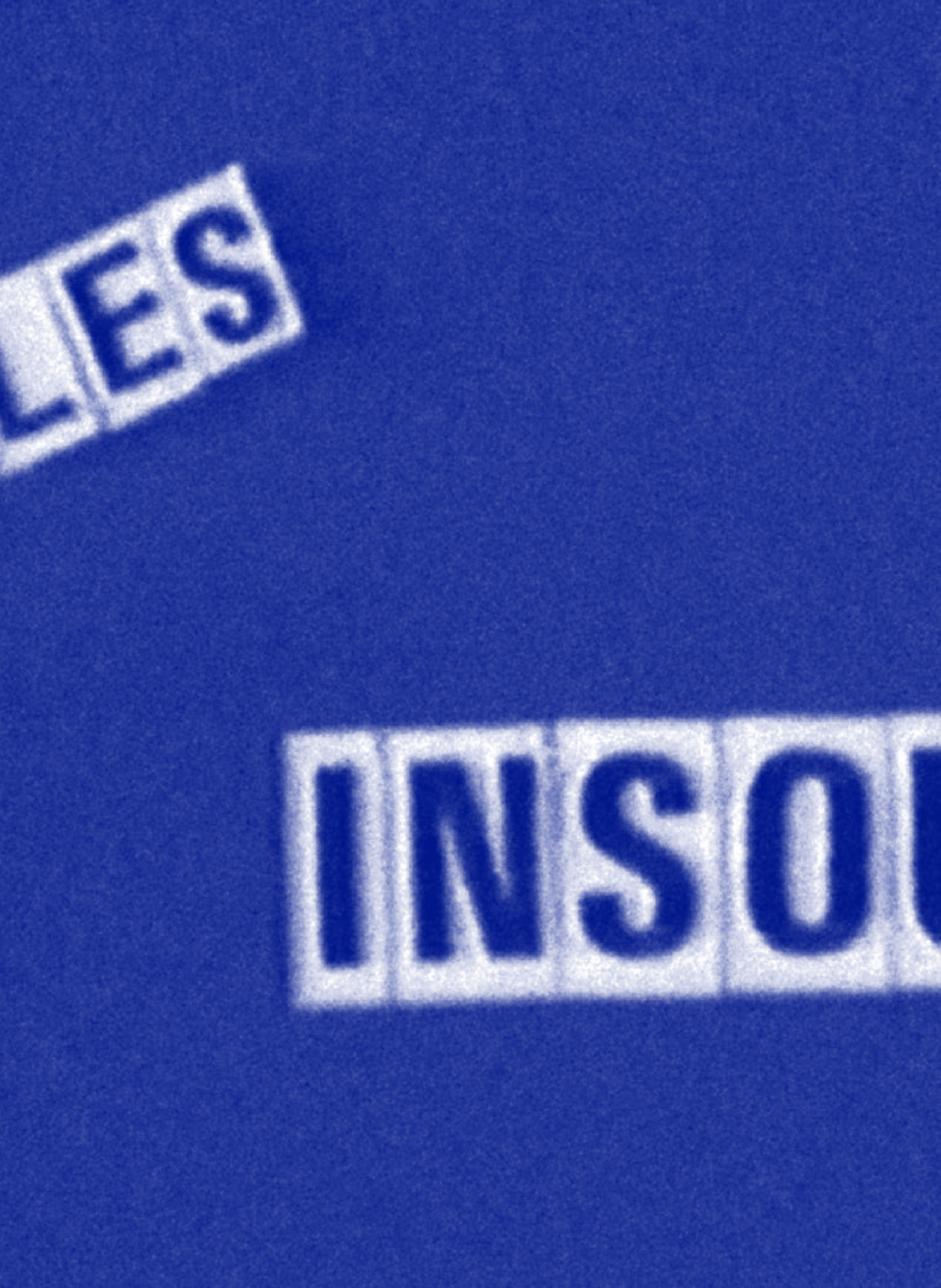
Defiant Muses




QUAND LES FEMMES
S'AIMENT
LES HOMMES NE
PAS
les
peuvent
guérir
maux






LES
INSO

Defiant Muses

Delphine Seyrig and the Feminist Video Collectives in France in the 1970s and 1980s



The French actress Delphine Seyrig attained international popularity in the 1960s with her appearances in films by such prestigious directors as Alain Resnais, Joseph Losey, François Truffaut, and Luis Buñuel. Although these were films of artistic quality, they reproduced and helped to perpetuate a stereotyped vision of gender roles. In them, Seyrig incarnated a model of idealized femininity, playing women with a distant and mysterious beauty who aroused both fear and attraction in men and whose feelings, perceptions, vulnerabilities, and desires were always left, cinematically speaking, out of shot.

Over the years, her engagement with the feminist movement led her not only to question those "ethereal diva" roles she had performed so successfully at the start of her career, but also to problematize her own profession as an actress and to assume the need to fight, with all the weapons available to her, against the structural sexism that existed in the cinema and the audiovisual industry. This was a world where women were marginalized from every decision-making process and where their capacity for action was limited.

Seyrig never abandoned her career as an actress, but she decided in the 1970s and 1980s to accept only stage or screen roles for women characters approached with a certain complexity, meaning they were treated as subjects and not as mere (and often obscure) objects of male desire. Crucial in this respect were her collaborations in these years with various women filmmakers—Chantal Akerman, Liliane de Kermadec, Ulrike Ottinger—with whom she established an intense artistic relationship that allowed her to infuse her work as a performer with a new political meaning.

Her conviction that women must construct autonomous spaces that will allow them to talk of their experiences, problematics, and struggles without mediation of any kind was also what aroused her interest in the new portable video technologies that burst onto the scene in France with the Portapak recording system. Seyrig met the filmmaker Carole Roussopoulos, who introduced her to the technique of video, and together with another militant feminist, Ioana Wieder, they cofounded Les Insoumuses (Defiant Muses), a video-activist collective that produced a series of films in the second half of the 1970s on themes such as abortion, female sexual autonomy, and the rights of sex workers. In these films, Les Insoumuses always opted to work collaboratively in documenting some of the main struggles of the women's liberation movement in France during those years.

In 1982, Seyrig, Roussopoulos, and Wieder created the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir. Still active today, the institution has played a key role in the preservation and diffusion of the audiovisual work generated by feminist collectives, both inside and outside France. Les Insoumuses always tried to situate their political commitment within an internationalist framework, arguing that feminists should cease to concern themselves only with the problems of French women and should seek alliances and confluences with the struggles of other oppressed collectives across the globe. This vindication of

the transnational dimension and intersectional character of feminism was central to many of the projects initiated by the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir in the 1980s.

Organized by the Museo Reina Sofía in collaboration with LaM Lille Métropole and the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir, this exhibition offers us a chance to learn about the multifaceted work Seyrig performed as a militant feminist and activist of the new media in the last decades of her career, while also exploring the network of political and artistic alliances established by the actress in those years. The show thus allows us to reappraise the figure of Seyrig, whose voluntary decision to abandon the privileged space she occupied as a fetish-actress and muse of the *cinéma d'auteur* constitutes an undoubtedly paradigmatic example of the assumption of the feminist premise that "the personal is political." It moreover invites us to reread the history of the women's liberation movement at the critical juncture of the 1970s and 1980s, taking the media practices generated around it as both a starting point and an articulating thread.

José Guirao Cabrera
Minister of Culture and Sport

In the minds of film buffs, the French actress Delphine Seyrig is associated with the incarnation of an idealized and sophisticated femininity, a sort of phantasmagorical (and so dehumanized) figure constructed for the delight of the desiring male gaze. The origin of this association, which still persists thirty years after her death, is the role that made her famous: the mysterious nameless woman she plays in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year in Marienbad*), a film made by Alain Resnais in 1961 to a screenplay by Alain Robbe-Grillet, two (male) heavyweights of European modernism in the second half of the twentieth century.

At the same time as it made her internationally known, this role became a kind of curse for Seyrig, who found herself relegated in the following years to playing characters of a very similar kind: seductive bourgeois women who fascinate and torment the men they encounter, whose point of view is always the one the spectator is shown. Seyrig soon rebelled against this typecasting and all it implied. Intuitively at first, and in full political awareness afterward, she made use of some of the tools, discourses, and strategies generated by the feminist movement.

As Alexandre Moussa explains, the reflexive quality of her acting (she was an actress who "acted and observed herself acting"), together with her determined involvement in the process of creation of the works she took part in, allowed her gradually to establish a critical distance from the fiction of femininity with which she was identified. This is illustrated by her roles in films like Resnais's *Muriel* (1963), William Klein's *Mister Freedom* (1968), Jacques Demy's *Peau d'âne* (*Donkey Skin*, 1970), and Luis Buñuel's *Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie* (*The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, 1972).

Nevertheless, her radical break with that fiction was brought on by her collaborations in the 1970s and 1980s with a series of women directors who more or less consciously or explicitly incorporated gender perspective in their films, such as Chantal Akerman, Marguerite Duras, Liliane de Kermadec, Ulrike Ottinger, and Agnès Varda. With these directors she assumed the need to conceive of "acting" as "action," and in the words of Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez and Giovanna Zapperi, the curators of this exhibition, they gave her the opportunity to "rethink her work in terms of a political technique." At the same time as she developed her process of awareness of the structural sexism existing in the film industry by carrying out a deconstructive operation on her own profession as an actress, Seyrig discovered the possibilities of the new portable video technologies as a tool for political action. Portable video was an implement that could be placed at the service of the feminist movement, used both to make visible the specificity and complexity of women's experiences and to document and broadcast women's reflections, demands, and struggles.

For her, video thus meant a chance to make cinema on the margins of a patriarchal logic and to rebel against a film industry that systematically restricted women's capacity for action, either by relegating them to merely subsidiary and ornamental functions or by helping to reproduce and perpetuate gender stereotypes. These are the ideas that articulate her documentary *Sois belle et tais-toi!* (*Be Pretty and Shut Up,* 1976), where twenty-four

actresses (among them Juliet Berto, Jane Fonda, and Maria Schneider) talk about their everyday routine on the set, their relationships with directors and coworkers (the vast majority of whom are men), and the need they have often felt for more roles written by women.

By managing to inscribe the singularity of the experience of each of these actresses within a collective conscience, Seyrig's documentary has an empowering effect similar to that generated by the "women's groups," then increasingly numerous, who met to share their experiences. As occurred in these groups, the succession of a series of personal testimonies in *Sois belle et tais-toi!* ends up constructing a collective narrative that serves to demonstrate, in the words of a celebrated feminist slogan coined in those years, that "the personal is political." Seyrig fully subscribed to that slogan, and in a way this was what prompted her to work so actively and committedly with video, a medium whose opportunities for self-management always made her consider it a potential "agent of political activism." Her first incursion into the world of video had taken place two years earlier, when she and her friend Ioana Wieder came into contact with the filmmaker Carole Roussopoulos, the founder of what may well have been the first video activism collective in France, Vidéo Out, and a pioneer in the use of the Portapak recording system. Under the name of Les Insoumuses (Defiant Muses), Roussopoulos, Wieder, and Seyrig made two films in 1976 with a markedly performative character, *SCUM Manifesto* and *Maso et Miso vont en bateau* (Maso and Miso go boating). As Ros Murray points out, these films explore the potential of video to articulate a defiant media practice that links the ludic and the transgressive while overspilling authorial logic, thus permitting women (and by extension other collectives that were denied the status of political subjects) to speak of themselves, by themselves, and for themselves.

The seminal experience of feminist video-activism set in motion by this group of women is inscribed within a historical context marked by decolonization, where feminism had started to acquire a transnational dimension and to incorporate an intersectional perspective. The need to work with that transnational element was something that was always borne in mind by Les Insoumuses, and especially by Seyrig, who was closely involved with the anti-imperialist movement and collaborated actively with groups opposed to the Vietnam War or campaigning against torture in Latin America.

The struggles of migrant and racialized populations also occupied an important place in the work of these video activists, even if they never managed to rid themselves entirely of a certain Eurocentric vision, something generally the case with the French militant and feminist groups of the period. Roussopoulos, for example, collaborated with the Black Panther Party and instructed some of its members in the technique of video, while Seyrig showed public support for the Mouvement des femmes noires (Black Women's Movement), an organization of immigrant women from West Africa and the Caribbean who mobilized themselves in the late 1970s against the structural racism of French society.

Special mention should go to the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir, which Roussopoulos, Wieder, and Seyrig founded in Paris in

1982 and which is still operative today (it was inactive for several years after Seyrig's death but reopened in 2004). Throughout the 1980s, this center produced and distributed a series of videos, some made with or by groups of migrant women living in France, which now emphasized the need to apply an intersectional focus to feminist analyses and projects. One of the best-known is *La Conférence des femmes—Nairobi 85* (The Women's Conference—Nairobi 85, 1985), a documentary filmed by Françoise Dasques on the forum of NGOs that was held parallel to the World Conference on Women organized by the United Nations in Nairobi in 1985. The forum gathered nearly 14,000 women from every part of the world and addressed issues that have recurred in the feminist debates of the last three decades, such as female genital mutilation, alliances with LGTBI+ groups, and the use of the veil in Islamic countries.

What Roussopoulos, Wieder, and Seyrig were seeking with the foundation of the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir was the creation of a space for production, investigation, and archiving that would allow them to continue making and distributing videos while at the same time fulfilling an educational function as a repository for the audiovisual work generated by the feminist movements both inside and outside France. Their basic conviction was that it was essential for feminist militants to know and appreciate their own genealogy, to not forget the continuity between their struggles and those of other women in the past.

The show we have organized on the figure, career, and collaborations of Seyrig is framed within one of the principal force lines around which the Museo Reina Sofía is currently working. In its program of temporary exhibitions, its projects to review and re-present the Collection, and its scheduled public activities, the Museum has granted considerable centrality in recent years to feminism and issues related to gender, the body, and sexual identity. Examples of this include exhibitions like those dedicated to the Swiss painter Miriam Cahn and the Hispano-Brazilian artist Sara Ramo. Others are projects like *Outside the Canon: The Pop Artists in Spain* and *The Poetics of Democracy: Images and Counter-images from the Spanish Transition*, in which the Museum's own collection is used as a starting point for an investigation of how the institutional discourse of the history of Spanish art in the 1960s and 1970s was constructed by making invisible— or at least pushing into the background—the role played by women artists and the feminist movement.

The policy of according increasing centrality to artistic practices led and carried out by women, and of retrieving and revising the work of women artists who had been excluded from the official narratives, is a general international tendency that undoubtedly fulfills a valuable function of historical reparation. However, history teaches us that every revolution has its own counterrevolution within it, and this tendency also entails a clear danger. If feminism is assumed in a purely formal and nominative way, incorporating its rhetoric but not its deconstructive and

emancipatory aspiration, it runs the risk of becoming aestheticized and depoliticized, of being deprived of its historical sense and its subversive charge, and of being transformed into a mere consumer item.

Besides fulfilling quotas (whose function at a given juncture we do not deny), we at the Museo Reina Sofía believe that artistic institutions must understand that the true political potential of feminism lies in the profound paradigm change it proposes and in its will and ability to dismantle the patriarchal logic that continues to determine the conditions of our existence. In the artistic field, this logic cannot be separated from the notion of authorship or from the prioritization of practices, devices, and techniques based on individuality and the creation of objects with an unequivocal exchange value over others that seek the construction of community, the activation of experiential processes, and an imbrication of art and life.

As evidenced by their determination to work collaboratively, putting the group before the individual and seeking to weave networks rather than to generate a closed corpus of works, Seyrig and her companions in Les Insoumuses were never in any doubt about the transformative vocation and potential of feminism. The practice developed by this group of women, who worked at the intersection of feminism, visual culture, and media activism, was a radically situated practice that overtly vindicated its genealogical roots and accepted the need to make allowances for the specific historical context in which it was inscribed.

This historical conscience is what allows us to keep feminism firmly linked to the question of class, an association that is fundamental if feminism is not to be co-opted by capital. For without incorporating the element of class, accepting that the forms of violence and oppression suffered by women in modern societies are closely related to the history of capitalism itself and cannot be viewed separately from those inflicted on other subordinate collectives, an adherence to feminism remains a purely cosmetic operation that ultimately provides an alibi for the (self-) legitimization of neoliberalism. With their early adoption of an intersectional perspective, their firm defense of a collaborative artistic and media practice, and their radical assumption that the personal is political, the experience of these video activists shows that what feminism proposes is a change that transcends the formal to aim at the very roots of inequality. We are always mindful of this premise when thinking and deciding how to approach our work on feminisms and gender politics.

Manuel Borja-Villel
Director of Museo Nacional
Centro de Arte Reina Sofía


MENU O.N.U
1974 FAIM
1975 FEMME
1976 FROMAGE ou DESSERT


mais Qu'est.ce Qu'elles Veulent
GIROUD A LA BARRE DU VAISSEAU FANTÔME
1975. ANNÉE DE LA FEMME
1976. ANNÉE DU CHIEN

Nadja Ringart, Carole Roussopoulos, Delphine Seyrig, and Ioana Wieder. *Maso et Miso vont en bateau* [Maso and Miso go boating], 1976

Catherine Deudon. Demonstration against UN’s International Women’s Year and against Françoise Giroud, France’s Secretary of State for the Condition of Women (1974–1976), 1975

Defiant Muses: An Introduction

Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez and Giovanna Zapperi

"So, at the heart of it, your feminism consists of what precisely?"[1]

"In my communication with other women, this is the first thing. Listen to other women, talk with them. . . . I could not live if I didn't have this."[2]

Carole Roussopoulos.
Delphine Seyrig (and Viva) during the shooting of *Sois belle et tais-toi!* [*Be Pretty and Shut Up*], 1975 (detail)



Since cinema's inception, actresses have played a crucial role in the production and reproduction of gender ideology and stereotypes. Delphine Seyrig is no exception to this rule. Her name might convey the sophistication and mannerism typically connected to the female figure in French auteur cinema. The role she played in Alain Resnais's *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*, 1961), which was so crucial for her career and celebrity, is exemplary of this process in which the actress' femininity is produced as a divine apparition. Seyrig's initials, D. S., thus became synonymous with *déesse*, French for *goddess*.

Despite being known primarily as one of the leading actresses of 1960s–1970s French cinema, acting was not Seyrig's sole activity. During the 1970s she became a media and feminist activist working collaboratively within the framework of the women's liberation movement. She became interested in the possibilities provided by new portable video technologies to explore women's experiences and struggles, as well as the material conditions of their lives, while at the same time questioning her own profession in transformative ways. Seyrig openly addressed the power structures in which she felt trapped as a woman *and* as an actress, for in her view the two mostly coincided. Hence, our venture into the complexities of exhibiting Seyrig was marked by the need to circulate between different modes and categories of media history in relation to the history of feminism in France, and to travel across

1
"Alors votre féminisme, au fond, consiste en quoi?" Delphine Seyrig, television interview with Anne Sinclair, *L'Invité du Jeudi*, France 2, March 24, 1986.

2
"En ma communication avec d'autres femmes, c'est cela la première chose. Ecouter d'autres femmes, leur parler . . . je ne pourrais pas vivre si je n'avais pas ça." Ibid.

the continuum Seyrig inhabited: from the auteur cinema in which she was actress and muse to the disobedient practices in which she was video maker, actress, and activist.

Seyrig's trajectory resonates with the recent upheaval, in Hollywood and across the globe, of innumerable women speaking out against the structural sexism that sustains the film industry and the arts in general, as well as other fields of work. The feminist movement that has emerged in recent years prompts a return to some of the questions Seyrig addressed in the 1970s as part of a collective struggle. Her trajectory, for all its uniqueness, is also a striking exemplar of the 1970s feminist slogan, "the personal is political." The continuum between actress and activist that Seyrig embodied throughout her life, and especially in her career, points to the core of feminist politics, then and now: the entwinement of life and politics. Seyrig was not merely an actress who used her celebrity and privilege to promote a political cause but someone who continually tried to handle the complex entanglement of art, work, personal life, and politics. For Seyrig, creative expression was constantly intersected with a meditation on personal becoming, involving the attempt to transform both life and work via political activism. In her view politics entailed self-determination, alliances with other women, efforts to open up spaces and opportunities for immediate action, and an emphasis on relationships in opposition to competitive patriarchal structures.

Seyrig's significance lies not only in film history but in the histories of militant video and feminism. As film scholar Grace An observes, through Seyrig we can tell the history of 1970s feminism as a media history to which she contributed both as a producer of video works and in documenting the struggles of her time with the founding of the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir in Paris.[3] Whereas the history of feminism in France often tends to be contained within established polemical labels such as "MLF" (Mouvement de libération des femmes) or "French feminism," the materials collected for this exhibition open up the possibility for a revision of this history.[4] As opposed to a legacy centered on a theoretical body of work involving the fields of psychoanalysis, philosophy, and writing (the "écriture féminine"), the exhibition focuses on an alternative history in which media practices, activism, and visual culture take the leading role. Seyrig's collaborative work, most notably with fellow feminists Carole Roussopoulos and Ioana Wieder, is exemplary of an emancipatory use of video as part of a shared political agenda. The radical potential of their productions lies in their ability to combine humor, social critique, and the construction of a feminist gaze.

Seyrig started to use the camera around 1974 after participating in training sessions organized by activist filmmaker Roussopoulos, who taught cinema at the newly founded Université de Vincennes à Saint-Denis in Paris.[5] Along with Jean-Luc Godard, Roussopoulos was one of the

3
Grace An, "From Muse to Insoumuse: Delphine Seyrig, vidéaste," unpublished paper, 2017. The Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir was founded by Seyrig with Carole Roussopoulos and Ioana Wieder. On its history and activities, see the interview with Nicole Fernández Ferrer elsewhere in this catalogue.

4
On "French Feminism," see Christine Delphy, "The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move," in "50 Years of Yale French Studies: A Commemorative Anthology; Part 2: 1980–1998," special issue, *Yale French Studies*, no. 97 (2000): 166–97.

5
See Hélène Fleckinger, "Une révolution du regard: Entretien avec Carole Roussopoulos, réalisatrice féministe," *Nouvelles questions féministes* 28, no. 1 (2009): 105.

first to own the Portapak video system designed by Sony in the late 1960s. In the early 1970s she and her husband, Paul, founded the first militant video collective, Vidéo Out, which gave voice to oppressed and socially excluded citizens. In the mid-1970s, Ioana Wieder and Seyrig, together with Claude Lefèvre-Jourde, Monique Duriez, and Josée Constantin, organized the collective Les Muses s'amusent (The Muses Have Fun). Wieder, Seyrig, and Roussopoulos later transformed it into Les Insoumuses (a play on words that combines *insoumise*—unruly or disobedient—and *muse*; it can be translated as "Disobedient Muses" or "Defiant Muses"). The collective's video productions show how visual and media practices emanating from the experiences of the women's movement allow for a rethinking of the image and the gaze in the context of a struggle for autonomy. Visual pleasure is thus replaced by the invention of new forms of collective agency and media critique. As Anne-Marie Duguet points out, these productions participate in a context in which new portable video technologies were largely appropriated by women in a gesture of disobedience and emancipation.[6]

6
Anne-Marie Duguet, *Vidéo, la mémoire au poing* (Paris: Hachette, 1981).

The videos produced by Les Insoumuses and its circle resonate with a large set of questions concerning art and politics today: the exploration of gendered roles, the feminine gaze, the body as a place of conflict and resistance, which are just some of the topics we explore in this exhibition. Les Insoumuses' strategic appropriation of the audiovisual medium crosses paths with several

of the issues Seyrig was involved in, such as the struggle for women's reproductive rights and abortion, the rights of sex workers and political prisoners, engagements against torture and the Vietnam War, the anti-psychiatric movement, and a general, ongoing commitment to human rights. Although the exhibition focuses on Seyrig's multiple activities and her path to activism, its aim is not to provide a biographical profile or simply pay homage to an important historical figure.[7] Rather, in revisiting Seyrig's collaborations, we seek to map a network of her political and creative alliances and intersections, including with such significant figures as filmmakers Chantal Akerman, Marguerite Duras, Ulrike Ottinger, Liliane de Kermadec, Agnès Varda; artist and cinematographer Babette Mangolte; writer and painter Etel Adnan; actress Jane Fonda; and fellow Insoumuses Roussopoulos and Wieder. Through this network of feminist figures involved in the field of visual culture, the exhibition seeks to reactivate the history of video and cinema in France at the critical juncture of the 1970s from a gendered and feminist perspective. Videos, artworks, photographs, archival documents, and films are associated in nonchronological order within thematic sections that convey the multiple political issues that women were raising at this precise historical moment.

7
For a biographical account of Seyrig's life, see Mireille Brangé, *Delphine Seyrig: Une vie* (Paris: Éditions Nouveau Monde, 2018).

1.

Undoing the Diva as a Form of Media Critique

Seyrig's profession as an actress is the point of departure for a critical reflection on the construction of femininity and for the emancipation of a female gaze through audiovisual media. Seyrig, the very incarnation of an idealized and sophisticated femininity in *Last Year at Marienbad*, subsequently unpacked such stereotyped images by using recitation as a site for the exploration of female identity. The first part of the exhibition thus examines how Seyrig, as actress, video maker, and feminist, delved into (and out of) female roles. Her numerous collaborations with women filmmakers in the 1970s and 1980s played a crucial role in both her personal and political becoming. During these two decades, Seyrig worked with women directors who enabled her to rethink her work in terms of a political technique. In an interview discussing the character she plays in Akerman's 1975 film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, Seyrig clarifies that working with women directors enabled her to realize possibilities she had been denied: "It's not just being an actress, but acting within a context that means something to me personally. This never happened to me before. . . . But now I feel I don't have to hide behind a mask, I can be my own size. It changes acting into action, what it was meant to be."[8] The shift toward defining acting as action reveals Seyrig's personal endeavor to give her

8
Marsha Kinder, "Reflections on Jeanne Dielman," *Film Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (Summer 1977): 6.

work new meaning as political technique. Acting thus enabled her to fully express the complexities of a woman's existence.

Seyrig's growing awareness of the power relations shaping the actress's status and labor coincide with her discovery of video, as she recounts to feminist philosopher Françoise Collin: "[The video] has been for me a possibility to make cinema without asking anybody else's help . . . a revelation, an enormous pleasure, an enormous revenge against the fact that I am called at 6 a.m. to have my hair done, my make-up done and that we are shooting, and that I have to be like this and like that."[9] One of the most remarkable outcomes of Seyrig's engagement with video as a way to express an autonomous voice is her 1976 documentary *Sois belle et tais-toi!* (*Be Pretty and Shut Up*), a reflection on the film industry's tendency to contain women's agency within preestablished parameters. Seyrig herself had experienced these mechanisms in her work as an actress; for example, in the limited range of roles she was offered, but also in the way her acting tended to be read only as participating in the construction of the image of the female star. In keeping with this self-reflectiveness, *Sois belle et tais-toi!* stitches together the filmed testimonies of twenty-four actresses Seyrig interviewed in France and the United States, including Fonda, Maria Schneider, Marie Dubois, Juliet Berto, Anne Wiazemsky, Viva, and Ellen Burstyn. These women share their experiences with film shootings, gender stereotypes, relationships with directors

9
"[La vidéo] pour moi ça a été la possibilité de faire du cinéma sans rien demander à personne . . . une révélation, un énorme plaisir, une revanche énorme contre le fait que qu'on me convoque à 6 heures du matin pour me faire coiffer, maquiller et qu'on tourne, et que je doive être comme ci et comme ça." Françoise Collin, "Être bien avec les femmes: Delphine Seyrig," *Les Cahiers du GRIF*, no. 28 (1983): 79–80.

and masculine coworkers, their solitude when on location, the need for roles to be written by women, and the desire to forge connections among women. *Sois belle et tais-toi!* underlines a shared experience of alienation, in which the self is caught in multiple constraining devices that are activated both on and off the screen. The film's empowering effect comes from its ability to articulate the singularity of each woman's experience within a growing collective awareness. Even though each interview was filmed separately—with Seyrig asking questions and Roussopoulos filming—the way the video is edited enables a collective becoming that echoes what emerged through the feminist practice of consciousness raising, as women gathered together to share their experiences. The women's group thus allowed the political meaning of what each woman was experiencing at an individual level to be realized, much in the same way as happens in *Sois belle et tais-toi!* In the video, the representation of a female gaze directed toward oneself ruptures both the actress's isolation and the traditional association between women and narcissism, women's status in representation as the object of the male gaze. Instead, it opens up the possibility of a different becoming that is grounded on a new form of media critique and appropriation.



Maria Schneider, Delphine Seyrig, and Carole Roussopoulos during the shooting of *Sois belle et tais-toi!* [*Be Pretty and Shut Up*], 1975



Delphine Seyrig, *Sois belle et tais-toi!* [*Be Pretty and Shut Up*], 1976



They told me I had to dye myself blonde because blonde was what you had to be. / Oh, and they wanted them to break my jaw / because they were going to invest money in me / to make me commercial. / Most women in films / are secondary for the plot. / Most stories are about men. / As a black woman, at first I played a lot of maids. / There's been progress in roles for black women. / Now it's very hard to get a part as a maid. / It's a taboo. / Always parts as prostitutes, as alcoholics.

"Men like sluts." / That was the phrase which defined my role. / And they're nice people, leftwing kids, decent directors…


"A los hombres
les gustan las guarrillas".


Esa era la frase
que definía mi papel.


Y son buena gente, chicos
de izquierdas, directores correctos...


Solo me dan papeles
de esquizofrénica, de loca, de lesbiana,

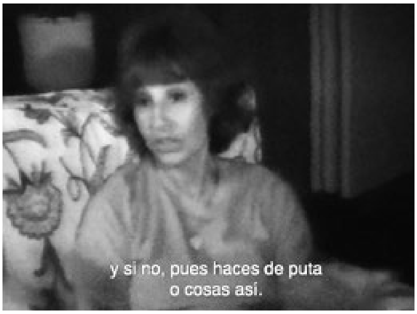

En el fondo el cine no es más
que una enorme fantasía masculina.



















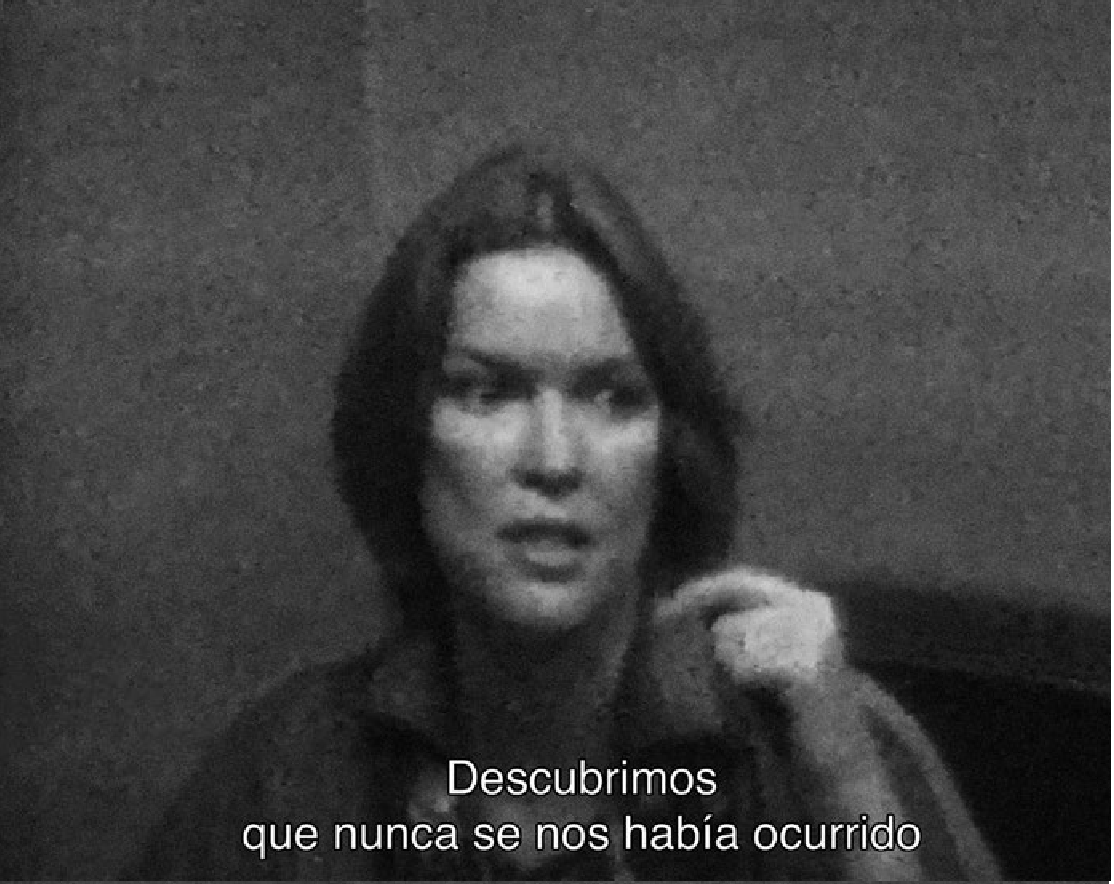


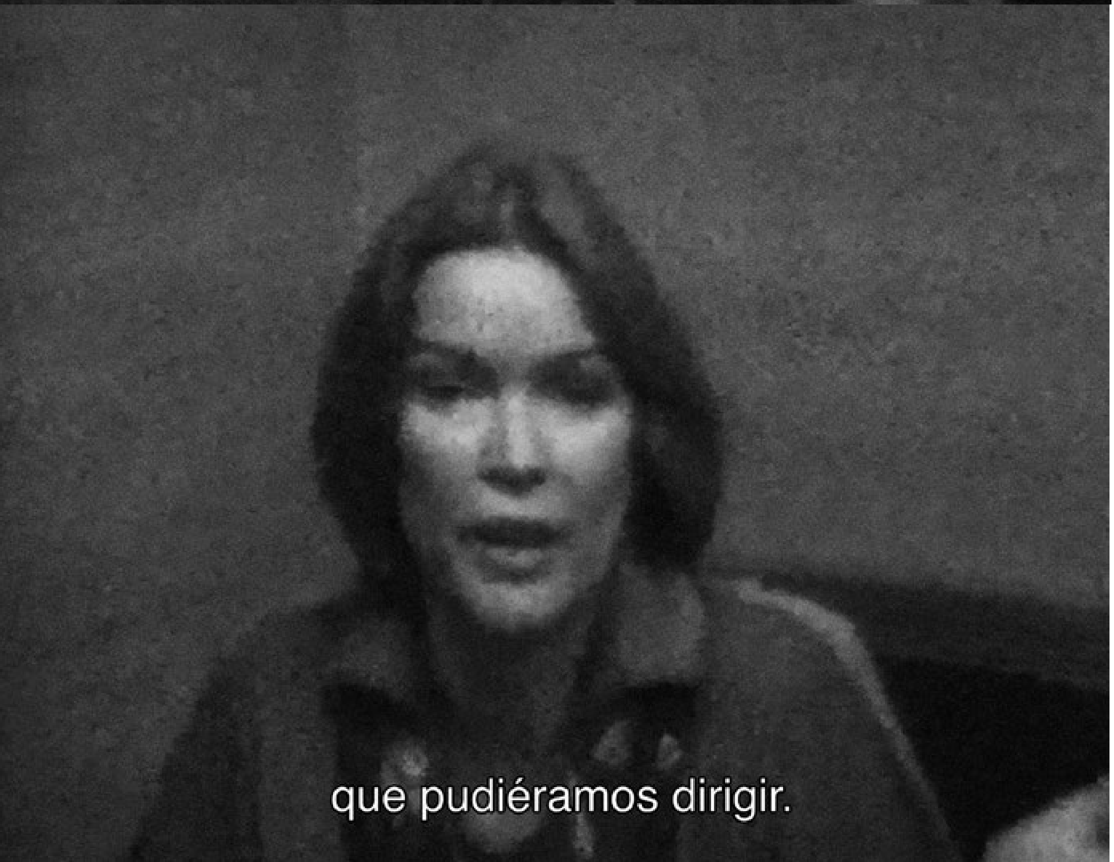




They only give me parts as a schizophrenic, a lunatic, a lesbian. / When it comes down to it, the cinema is just a huge male fantasy.

Female roles are very poor, and there are very few of them. / As you well know, all the stars are men / and the good parts are all for them. / And on TV, either you play a mother, / or else you play a whore or something like that. / The producers and technicians are men, / the directors are nearly all men, / in the press it's more evenly distributed, but in the end they're men. / The agents are men. / The people who give you the script, advise you / and guide you are men. / And I get the feeling the subjects dealt with are for men.


Descubrimos
que nunca se nos había ocurrido


que pudiéramos dirigir.



We discovered it had never occurred to us / that we could direct.

How does a woman of 40, 50, or 60 fit in? / She has no place in male fantasies, / so she's eliminated. / I don't know if you… You've probably been through this yourself. / I'm with a director who's thought of me for a part. / I've read the script and… / There comes a point when I forget the situation and start to talk about the script. / I don't say whether it's good or bad, but I commit myself, / and the director feels it's aggressive.





Carole Roussopoulos. Shooting of *Sois belle et tais-toi!* [*Be Pretty and Shut Up*] in Topanga Canyon, California, 1976

Duncan Youngerman. Delphine Seyrig and Carole Roussopoulos, 1975

Carole Roussopoulos. Delphine Seyrig (and Viva) during the shooting of *Sois belle et tais-toi!* [*Be Pretty and Shut Up*], 1975





Carole Roussopoulos.
Viva and Delphine Seyrig during the shooting of *Sois belle et tais-toi!* [*Be Pretty and Shut Up*], 1975



2.

Practicing Disobedience

A crucial part of the exhibition is devoted to the struggles and political alliances—primarily around questions of sexuality and reproductive rights—that Seyrig, Roussopoulos, and Wieder were involved in during the 1970s. *Maso and Miso vont en bateau* (Maso and Miso go boating) and *SCUM Manifesto* (both 1976), the most important of Les Insoumuses' productions, are exemplary of a disobedient media practice calling for new forms of self-organization in which video becomes an agent of political activism.[10] Alongside her active participation in the elaboration of a new feminist visual vocabulary with video, Seyrig was publicly committed to the cause of abortion rights and female sexual autonomy. She appeared on television to advocate for free and legal abortion, testified at the 1972 Bobigny trial (in which a young woman was prosecuted for having an abortion), and supported women who needed an abortion—by providing information, money, or even a safe place (often her own apartment) in which to perform the procedure.[11] These activities also resonate in women's video productions from around that time, especially ones in which Roussopoulos was involved.[12]

Following Roussopoulos's production and her collaborations with Seyrig and Wieder, this section of the exhibition showcases several videos, as well as visual and text-based documents, from the 1970s as a way to provide access to

10
The video *SCUM Manifesto* references Valerie Solanas' eponymous text. See V. Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto* (1967; London: Verso, 2004). For an in-depth analysis of these two videos, see Ros Murray's essay elsewhere in this catalogue. See also J. Bézille, H. Fleckinger, and C. McNulty, eds., *SCUM Manifesto* (Paris: Naima, 2018).

11
Brangé, *Delphine Seyrig*, 288–91. In August 1972, during a meeting organized at Seyrig's apartment, a safer method of abortion, developed by the American psychologist Harvey Karman, was demonstrated for doctors of the Groupe information santé. The new method enabled abortions to be practiced more widely, although still illegally. See Sylvia Duverger, "Simone Iff: Du protestantisme au féminisme (1924–2014)," *Nouvelles questions féministes* 34, no. 1 (2015): 158–66.

12
For a survey of feminist video practices in France, see Ros Murray, "Raised Fist: Politics, Technology and Embodiment in 1970s French Feminist Video Collectives," *Camera Obscura* 3, no. 1 (2016): 93–120; and Stephanie Jeanjean, "Disobedient Video in France in the 1970s: Video Production by Women's Collective," *Afterall*, no. 27 (Summer 2011). See also Hélène Fleckinger, "Cinéma et Vidéo saisis par le féminisme: France, 1968–1981," PhD diss., Université Sorbonne Nouvelle—Paris 3, 2011.

some of the intertwined struggles of the time. The chosen materials primarily refer to issues of sexuality, reproduction, and sex work. For example, Roussopoulos's *Le FHAR* (1971) documents a meeting of the eponymous gay and lesbian organization, while her *Y'a qu'à pas baiser* (Just avoid sex, 1971), shows footage of a 1971 demonstration demanding legal abortion with a sequence documenting a self-organized abortion, a widespread practice within the feminist movement in France. In both cases, images of street protests are edited together with scenes in which the subjects of the struggle speak, be it during a public meeting or in a private setting, where Roussopoulos hands the microphone over to the speaking person, thus turning the camera into a listening device. These videos were produced in close collaboration with the subjects they depict. In an interview with Hélène Fleckinger, Roussopoulos highlights what she calls an "éthique du tournage"», an ethics of filming that is also a form of empowerment.[13] For Roussopoulos, the footage she produced belongs to the filmed persons as much as to herself. She chose to approach only the subjects of the struggle; that is, those people who were fully aware of what was happening to them. They are not victims but subjects who understand the possibility provided by video to communicate with others who are experiencing the same oppression.

13
Fleckinger, "Une révolution du regard," 112.

Le FHAR, for example, documents an early stage of the Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire (Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action).

After Roussopoulos attended one of the group's meetings, she was asked by its members to film the May 1 demonstration that marked the group's first appearance in public. Roussopoulos then showed the resulting footage at the group's next meeting and filmed the discussion that followed. The outcome, *Le FHAR*, edits together scenes from the demonstration and the intense debate that followed their screening. In Roussopoulos's videos, the form of the "video portrait" becomes a way to convey the immediacy and the relational dimension involved in the filming, while at the same time providing counterinformation on subjects that were too controversial for public television.

Les Prostituées de Lyon parlent (The prostitutes of Lyon speak out, 1975) is groundbreaking for its intimate portrayal of sex workers defining their struggle in their own terms.[14] The video depicts a group of sex workers occupying a church in Lyon in order to demand the end of arbitrary arrests and fines, greater freedom, and more respect from the police. Roussopoulos's (and Seyrig's) understanding of the issue of sex work was greatly informed by Kate Millett's *The Prostitution Papers* (the subject of another video shown in this section of the exhibition, *Kate Millett parle de la prostitution avec des féministes* (Kate Millett talks about prostitution with feminists), made in 1975 by the collective Vidéa), which is based on the idea that feminists need to listen to sex workers in order to build political alliances.[15] Sex work remains one of the most controversial and divisive topics in feminist debates, from which sex workers

14
Murray, "Raised Fist," 110.

15
Kate Millett, *The Prostitution Papers* (New York: Avon Books, 1973). Vidéa is the name of a women's video collective composed of Anne-Marie Faure-Fraisse, Syn Guérin, and Catherine Lahourcade. In the video, Millett discusses prostitution with Monique Wittig and Christine Delphy, among others.

themselves are mostly excluded. *Les Prostituées de Lyon parlent* provides an opportunity to listen to what they have to say about the material conditions in which they work. Most important, the video shows that alliances between sex workers and feminist activists are possible. While the striking sex workers were initially suspicious about being filmed, they eventually allowed Roussopoulos and Seyrig inside the church when they realized that being filmed was another way for them to communicate with the outside: the Portapak system allowed for interviews to be filmed inside the church and then shown outside, where passersby could gather and listen to what the workers had to say.[16]

16
Seyrig was the only celebrity permitted to enter and film the general assembly of the sex workers, held a few weeks later at the employment center in Lyon.



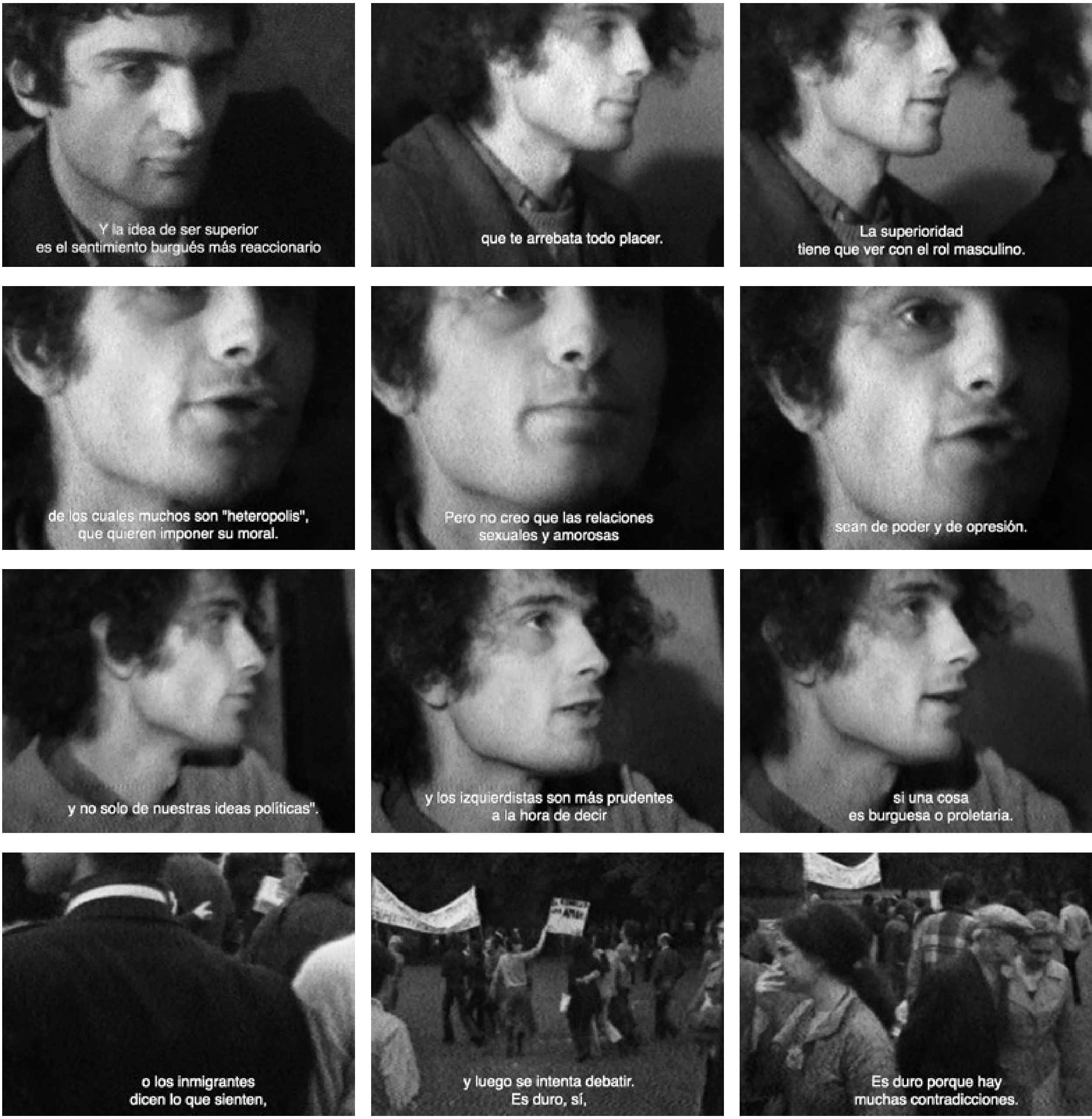
Alain Voloch. Delphine Seyrig shooting the General Assembly of the French Prostitutes at the Bourse du travail (People's House) in Lyon, 1975



Carole Rousssopoulos, *Le FHAR (Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire)* [The FHAR (Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action)], 1971

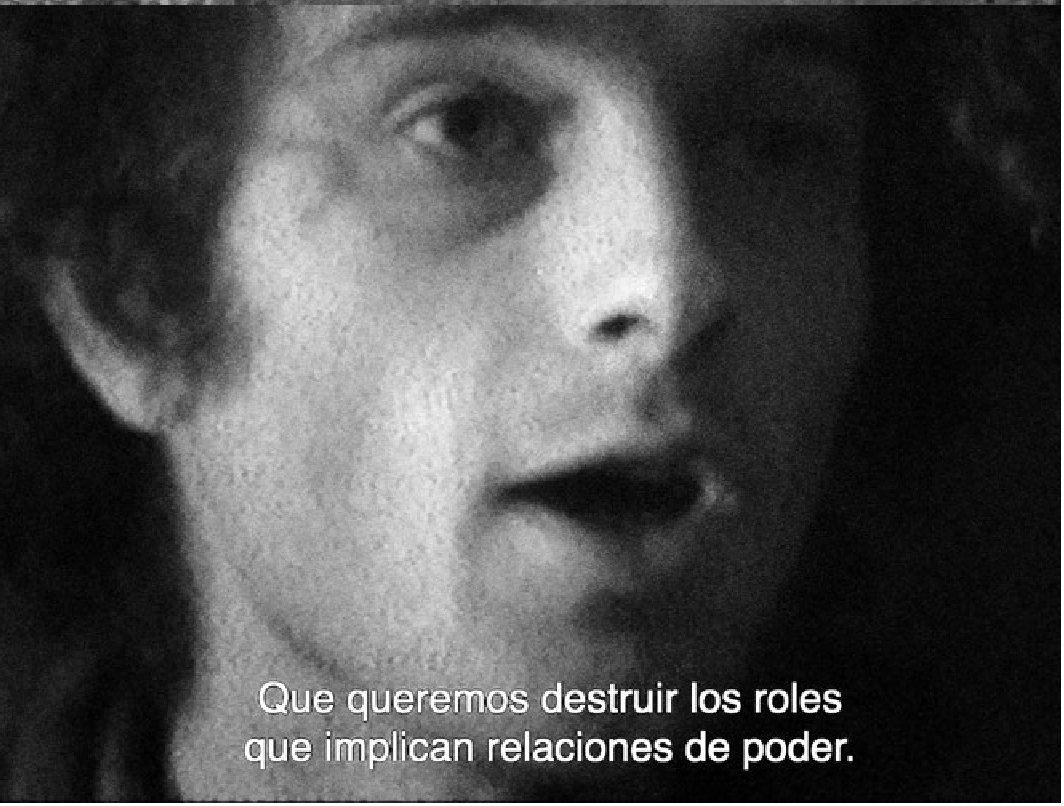


The fact of wanting to fuck or be fucked / has nothing to do with being inferior or superior / but with the bourgeois mentality. / And the idea of being superior is the most reactionary bourgeois sentiment / that takes every kind of pleasure away from you. / Superiority has to do with the male role.
We want to destroy roles that imply power relations. / To destroy these relations, we have to start by applying them / to those who hold power, those we call straight, / many of them members of the "straight police" who want to impose their morality. / But I don't think sexual and amorous

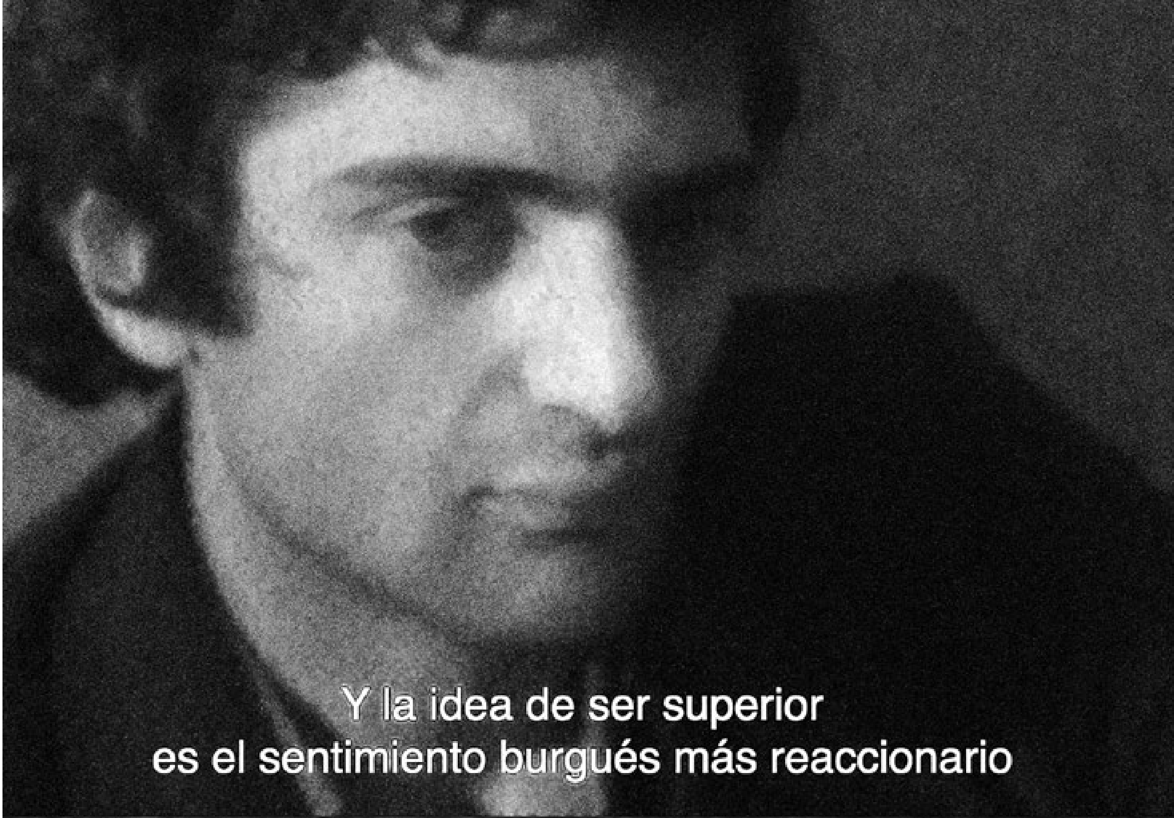


relationships / are about power and oppression. / I think the public presence of the FHAR owes a great deal / to the path opened by the MLF / and the fact of saying: "We're going to start from what we are / and not only from our political ideas." / And leftists are more cautious when it comes to deciding / if something is bourgeois or proletarian. / We've moved beyond the phase where we used to meet / around political ideas or a strategy. / Now we have movements where men, women / or immigrants say what they think / and then there's an attempt to debate it. It's hard, yes. / It's hard because there are lots of contradictions.





We want to destroy roles that imply power relations.





And the idea of being superior is the most reactionary bourgeois sentiment





Carole Roussopoulos filming Barbara during the shooting of *Les prostituées de Lyon parlent* [The prostitutes of Lyon speak out], 1975

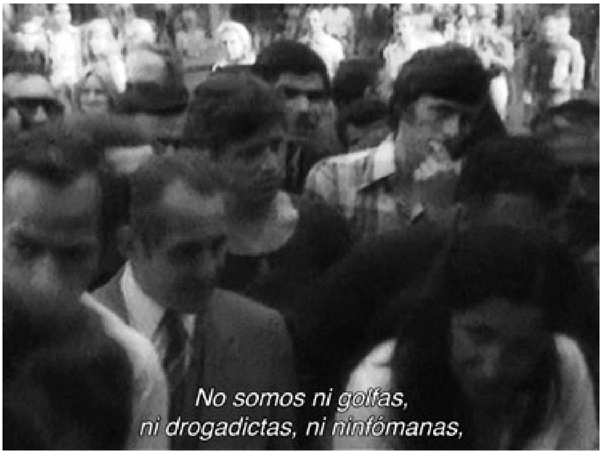
Carole Roussopoulos, *Les prostituées de Lyon parlent* [The prostitutes of Lyon speak out], 1975



We're here about those days in jail, / and we're protesting about the problem of the fines as well. / Every fine means three to eight days in jail and costs 160 francs. / Any woman can wind up as a prostitute: / The secretary who sleeps with her boss so he doesn't throw her out, / The shop assistant who lets them grope her ass so they don't throw her













out. / We're not sluts, or drug addicts, or nymphomaniacs, / And we've only got one worry: our kids. / I want all the French people who feel this is addressed to them / to come to all the churches where there are prostitutes / because we need them. / Not because we're prostitutes, but because we're women.

Vidéa (Catherine Lahourcade, Anne-Marie Faure-Fraisse, Syn Guérin), *Kate Millett parle de la prostitution avec des féministes* [Kate Millett talks about prostitution with feminists], 1975



That's the difficulty: if we want to condemn prostitution, / there's a risk of condemning the prostitute too. / When they meet members of the American women's movement, / prostitutes often feel there's a confrontation, / because sometimes they feel













condemned / by the women's movement, which says: "Prostitution is slavery." / And in a way I understand it, / there's a condemnation of their position. / But if a prostitute hears that… / And I'm not at all sure about it.





our time has come



TENDREMOS
LOS HIJOS QUE QUERAMOS

Carole Roussopoulos, *Y'a qu'à pas baiser* [Just avoid sex], 1971



AGAINST? / Free abortion, yes or no? The doctors speak. / "The doctors blame themselves." But what do they blame themselves for? / Changing sides. / Free abortion and contraception without charge! / To prevent differences between rich and poor women, / because the rich women can go abroad, / they propose a common market of abortion. / They proclaim the virtues of vacuum aspiration. / The blood, after the second week, / gives life to the very being / that will later be a child.
























We shall have the children we want! / WE SHALL HAVE THE CHILDREN WE WANT / Down with school! Equality! / - What do you think? - That they're right. / Oh, yes, they're right. / - And you're not out there demonstrating with them? – No. / What are they asking for? / Free abortion at no cost and information about contraception. / They'd better just not fuck.


c'est tout
de même
plus
chouette
de vivre
quand
est
VIVIR ES MEJOR
CUANDO SE ES DESEADO


Seamos conscientes
de nuestra fuerza, mujeres,



LIVING IS NICER ALL THE SAME WHEN YOU'RE WANTED / Let us be aware of our strength, women.

Contraception has to be adapted to sexuality, / which evolves with time. / That of a woman of 60 is not the same as that of a young girl. / That's why it's necessary for women to be conscious and free to choose. / I think it's better to talk about that rather than abortion. / FREE ABORTION AND CONTRACEPTION AT NO CHARGE! / Let us rise, enslaved women. / It is the hour of wrath, women, / Our time has come. / Let us be aware of our strength, women.

3.

Transnational Networks and Struggles

Another crucial part of the exhibition concerns the transnational networks and struggles in which Seyrig and her fellow Insoumuses were actively involved. One of this section's main concerns is to tackle the emergence of a transnational feminist network, an issue that strongly resonates with the present. This, along with the previous sections, forms the political core of the exhibition, allowing a look back on feminism's transnational dimension and the making of connections to the experience of colonialism during an era marked by decolonization.

Seyrig was born in Beirut to an intellectual family. Her mother, Hermine "Miette" de Saussure, was a scholar interested in the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the niece of linguist and semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure. Her father, Henri Seyrig, was a renowned archaeologist and general director of antiquities in Syria and Lebanon, a collector of modern art, a cultural attaché with the Free France delegation to the United States during World War II, director of Musées de France (1960–1962) and director of the Institut français d'archéologie de Beyrouth (French Institute of Archeology in Beirut) for twenty-one years. Among his friends were Lebanese poet and playwright Georges Schehadé, André Breton, Fernand Léger, Martiniquan poet and politician Aimé Césaire, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Delphine

Seyrig lived on several occasions in the United States, including an extended stay in the late 1950s when she was married to the painter Jack Youngerman, who belonged to the circle of modern art pioneers. The couple shared a building on the Coenties Slip in Lower Manhattan with artists Agnes Martin, Ellsworth Kelly, and Robert Indiana.

This part of the exhibition focuses on Seyrig's commitments that she maintained throughout decades within an "internationalist" framework. In 1962, she played the leading role in Resnais's film *Muriel* about the catastrophic effects of the Algerian war, specifically the widespread practice of torture, on a French military veteran.[17] Seyrig would return to the issue of torture in her first video, *Inês* (1974), a work closely related to her political activism of the time: Seyrig was a member of the international committee demanding the liberation of Inês Etienne Romeu, a Brazilian political prisoner who had been incarcerated in 1971 and tortured for one hundred days. The video is a call for action. Seyrig's voice directly addresses General Ernesto Geisel, the Brazilian president, denouncing state crimes against women. *Inês* is a painful, albeit theatrical re-creation (the soundtrack is based on the song "Amada amante," which was played during Romeu's torture) of the torture endured by Romeu.[18] Romeu eventually escaped, and her testimony brought attention both to the specific prison where she was held and to the general practice of torture in Brazil.[19] Seyrig's commitment to protesting against torture can hardly be understood without the haunting memory

17
See one of the letters published in this catalogue, in which Seyrig, writing to her former husband, Jack Youngerman, reports on the notorious October 17, 1961, massacres of Algerian protesters in Paris.

18
The video *Inês* was conceived in close collaboration with Brazilian actress Norma Bengell, who was actively campaigning for Romeu's liberation. The actress performing Romeu in the video remains unidentified.

19
In 2009, Romeu received the Prêmio Direitos Humanos (Human Rights Prize) from Dilma Rousseff in the presence of Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

of the Algerian war. A clear line thus connects her early role in *Muriel* with her artistic and political awakening nearly a decade later.

For Seyrig, feminism was a transnational endeavor, as can be seen in her multiple engagements to protest the Vietnam War or to demand respect for the human rights of female political prisoners by traveling to the notorious Stammheim Prison in Stuttgart, where the members of the Rote Armee Fraktion (Red Army Faction) were being incarcerated and deprived of basic human rights. She translated for Millett in Paris when the American feminist writer gave her press conference after returning from Iran in 1979, and she continually mobilized against torture in Latin America. Among the works and documents presented in this section of the exhibition is the slide montage *Femmes au Vietnam* (Women in Vietnam), made by Fonda after her journey to Vietnam in 1972 and accompanied by sound recordings made in collaboration with Seyrig and her partner, Sami Frey.

The politics of race, ethnicity, and migration were also a crucial concern for the women gathered around Seyrig. Roussopoulos, in particular, followed the struggles of France's postcolonial and migrant population, and she became close to members of the Black Panther Party, sharing with them her technical knowledge about film and video in Algeria and Congo.[20] Seyrig was one of the few personalities who actively supported the Coordination des femmes noires (or Mouvement des femmes noires; Movement of Black Women),

20
For a polemical contribution on Seyrig's and Roussopoulos's transnational commitment, see the contribution by Françoise Vergès elsewhere in this catalogue.

a group of women migrants from West Africa and the Caribbean who were mobilized against racism and colonialist politics in France in the late 1970s.

In the 1980s, the Center audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir commissioned several videos that raised issues of transnational feminism and made demands for intersectionality; for example, *La Conférence des femmes—Nairobi 85* (The Women's Conference—Nairobi 85, 1985), by Françoise Dasques. This exceptional one-hour documentary depicts the proceedings of Nairobi's seminal 1985 forum of women's groups from around the world. The intense polemical speeches at the event address topics such as the Palestinian struggle, female genital mutilation, transnational alliances of LGBTQI communities, and the various significations of veiling women's bodies in postrevolutionary Iran. These topics are all debated exclusively by women—of all races, classes, and sexual orientations. In one scene activist, writer, and educator Angela Davis speaks about the need for feminists to join hands across race and class even as they acknowledge the specificity of each person's oppression. Other moments show discussions with decolonial feminist scholar Paola Bacchetta and transnational feminist Nawal El Saadawi. Throughout the 1980s, the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir also organized screenings for and produced videos with groups of migrant women living and working in France.[21]

21
See the interview with Nicole Fernández Ferrer elsewhere in this catalogue.





Delphine Seyrig, *Inês*, 1974









4.

Feminist Genealogies: Reading Calamity Jane

In the 1980s, Seyrig was particularly occupied with two projects: a film about letters allegedly written by the notorious American frontierswoman Calamity Jane to her daughter, and the creation of the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir in Paris, which was intended to archive, distribute, and preserve the audiovisual work of the Women's Liberation Movement. Together, these two initiatives invoke the subject of the past and the possibility of a feminist perspective on history. During the 1980s, Seyrig's awareness of the importance of preserving the traces of the struggles in which her generation had been involved was accompanied by an acute sense of women's history. In a 1986 interview with Anne Sinclair, when asked about her "Panthéon personnel" (i.e., when asked to speak about the great men and women who were relevant to her), Seyrig countered this (implicitly male) ideal of greatness by instead paying homage to the often anonymous and mostly dismissed and ridiculed women who fought for the right to vote in early twentieth-century Europe. As she explains in the interview, these struggles were extremely violent and even tragic: "it's important to know that we have this in our past. Many women ignore that they have a history."[22]

22
Seyrig, television interview with Sinclair.

Seyrig's film about Calamity Jane was never completed, but the finished script and the storyboard she prepared in collaboration with her son, Duncan Youngerman, describe all of the film's scenes in

detail with drawings accompanied by text. In the early 1980s, Mangolte filmed Seyrig's travel to Billings, Montana, where Jean Hickok McCormick—the supposed daughter of the historic persona Calamity Jane (Martha Canary)—had lived, visiting some of the people who had known her.[23] Seyrig's vision of the film is revealed in some of the letters she sent to her son in the early 1980s, as well as in the project proposal for the film, for which she never secured financial support. In the latter, for example, she writes,

23
For further information on the never completed film, see Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez' forthcoming volume to be published by If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution."

> The drama: relation between mother and daughter, refusal of a child and a repeated adoption of children who are abandoned by the others, instinctive refusal to carry a sexual role and consequentially isolation and misery, independence of spirit and body and monogamy of feelings. All these upheavals will be the fabric of the film and its *raison d'être*. . . . It might seem too ambitious: in reality, the image of the West that we know from so many Westerns evokes a cinema which is well done according to Hollywood norms. My proposal is much more modest and different. Images that come to my mind are simple images without any artificiality. A fragment of a silent movie.[24]

24
Delphine Seyrig, "Calamity Jane," project proposal, early 1980s, in the archives of Duncan Youngerman.

Seyrig imagined a silent black-and-white film, accompanied by music, and with herself playing Calamity Jane. She also wanted to collaborate with Sacha Vierny, who had been the cinematographer for *Last Year at Marienbad*, in order to avoid a realist style and convey an atmosphere reminiscent of silent cinema, as a way to give expression to her personal involvement with the subject. To much disappointment, the proposal did not receive the expected financial support, and Seyrig temporarily abandoned it, only to revive it by teaming up with

other writers to create a scenario. One of these was Etel Adnan, who had met Seyrig at a rehearsal for Robert Wilson's musical piece *the CIVIL warS*. From 1985 to 1987, Adnan and Seyrig worked on the scenario, one-third of which still exists (the other parts have unfortunately been lost).[25]

25
In an interview with Petrešin-Bachelez in November 2018, Adnan recalled that "Delphine identified herself with Calamity. This relation between mother and daughter obsessed her."

This last section of the exhibition examines the importance and current implications of women's genealogies and feminist archives through an examination of Seyrig's legacy and the question of feminism's audiovisual memory. In addition to the documents and films that speak to the issue of archives and their renewal, Mangolte has conceived for the exhibition a new film based on the montage of sequences filmed in Montana as part of Seyrig's research for the Calamity Jane project. Another notable piece in this section is *Pour mémoire* (In memory of). Seyrig made this film in 1986, one year after Simone de Beauvoir had passed away, as a gesture of remembrance and homage to a woman who had meant so much, both to Seyrig's personal becoming and to women's liberation movements across the globe. In asking de Beauvoir to give her name to the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir, Seyrig, Roussopoulos, and Wieder wanted to emphasize continuity among generations and the ongoing significance of previous generations' struggles for the present.

The political legacy of the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir is carried on throughout the exhibition, enabling us to capture Delphine Seyrig's and Les Insoumuses' essential contribution in constituting a visual archive of the feminist movements in and beyond France.

Delphine Seyrig and Duncan Youngerman. Storyboards with drawings (by Duncan Youngerman) for *Calamity Jane*, 1982

J'ai suivi une nouvelle piste aujourd'hui, ce doit être la nouvelle route postale, percée par l'équipe de Bozeman. Je pense les rattraper demain, ils font un travail dangereux et ça ne fera pas de mal d'être dans les environs au cas où ils auraient besoin de quelqu'un pour les aider à mettre les Sioux

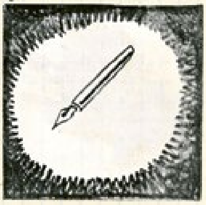


Sioux en fuite. Je pense que je suis le seul être humain dont ils aient peur. Sur cette page tu trouveras une photo de ta grand-mère Cannery ma mère. Elle et ton grand-père ont traversé les plaines dans un chariot lorsque j'étais une toute petite fille. On a habité des années dans le Missouri.



Ton papa Jim m'a envoyé une plume et une bouteille d'encre pour que je puisse lui écrire de temps en temps. Voilà un homme qui a quelque respect pour ta mère même si les autres n'en ont pas. Cette plume a été fabriquée en Irlande.

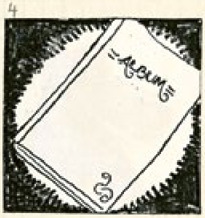
3



Insert du porte-plume décrit par Calamity.

Je la porte ainsi que cet album attachée à la selle

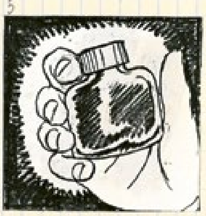
4



Gros plan de l'album dans lequel Calamity écrit ses lettres à Jeanie, éclairé par le feu.

et l'encre dans ma poche

5



Insert de l'encrier de Calamity éclairé par le feu.

pour pouvoir t'écrire comme ce soir

6



Gros plan de la main de Calamity mettant l'encrier dans sa poche.

à côté de mon feu de camp.

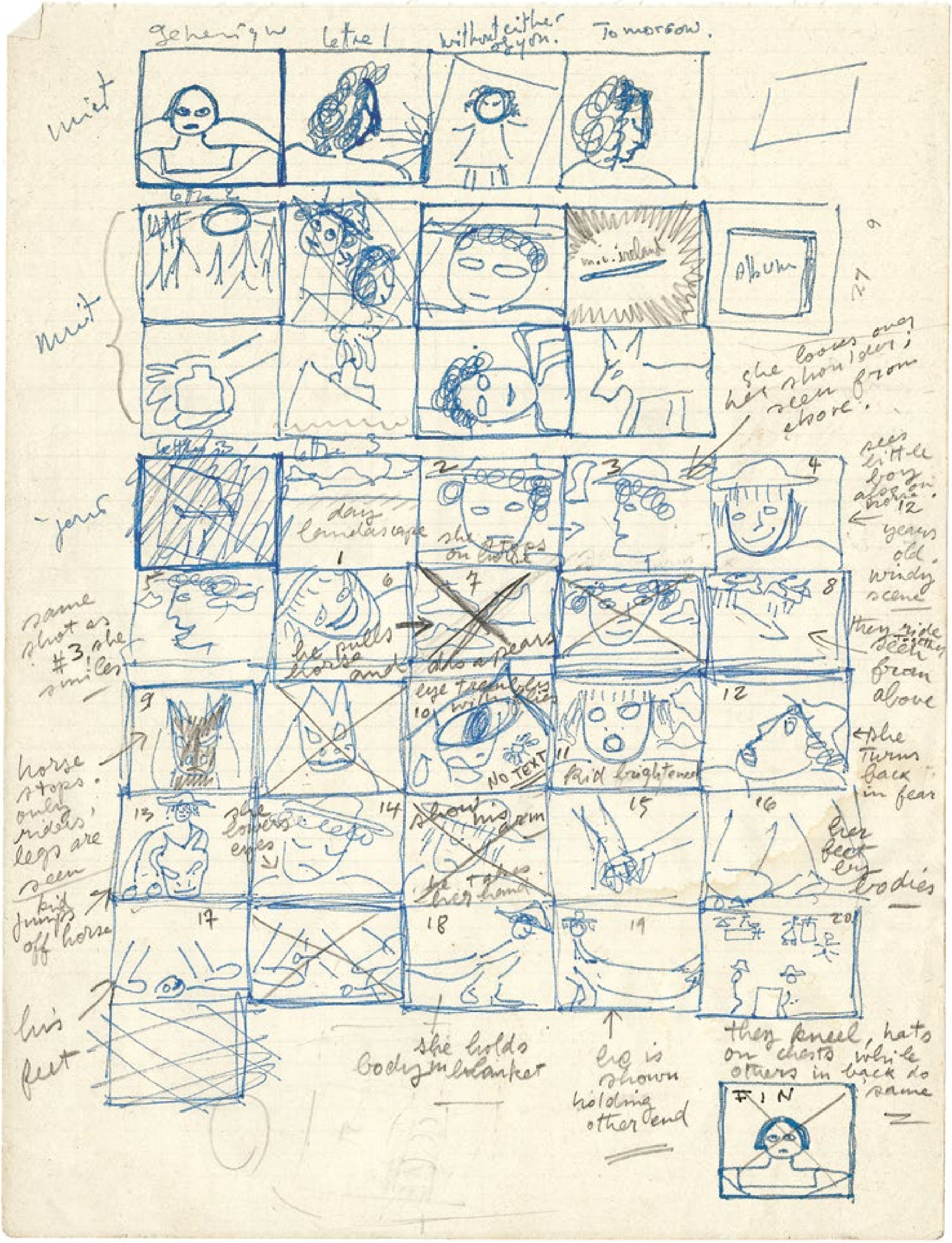
7



Plan large de Calamity couchée la tête adossée sur la selle, devant le feu, regardant son cheval Satan.

8



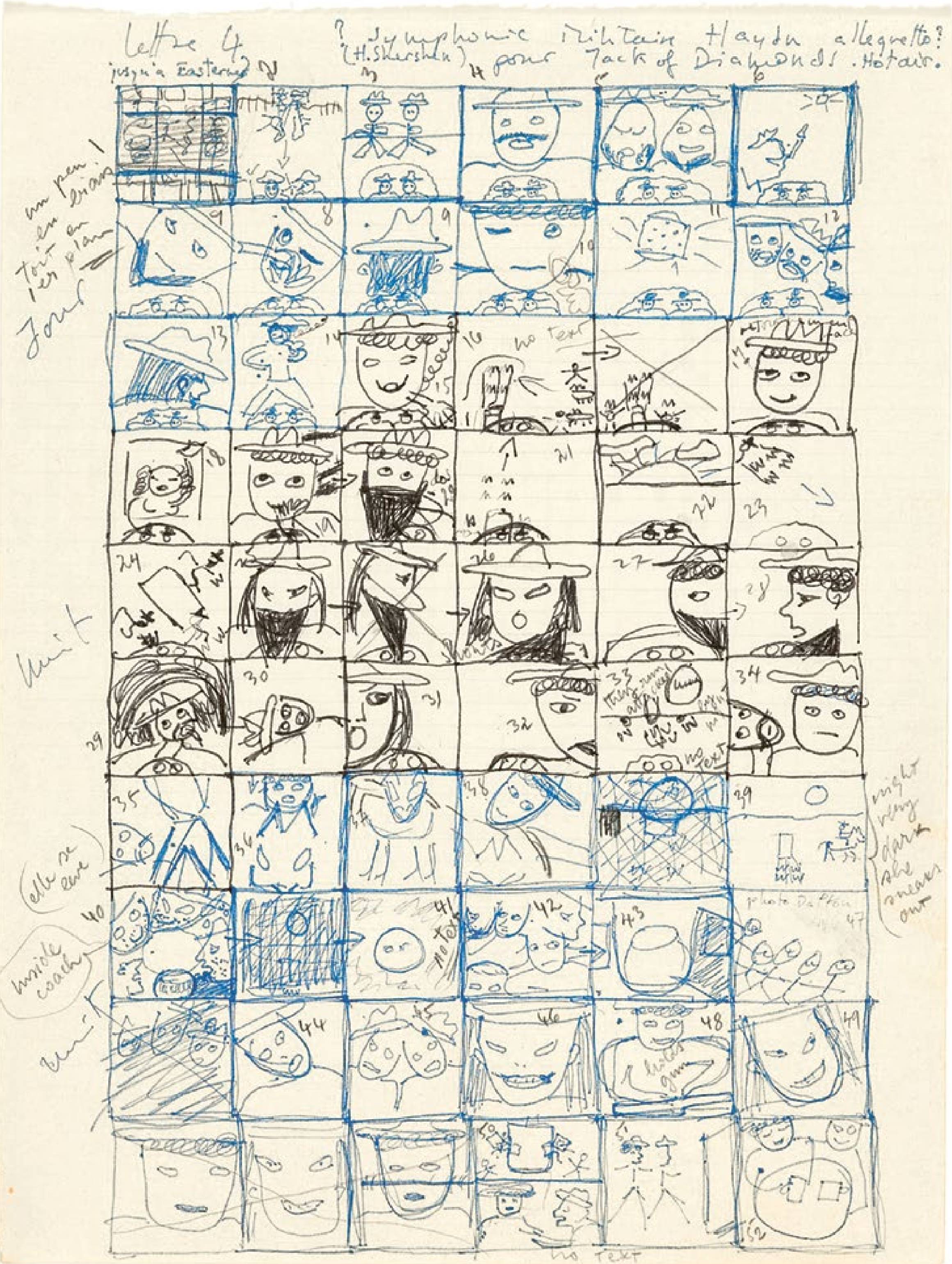


Delphine Seyrig. Sketches for *Calamity Jane*, ca. 1982

Babette Mangolte, *Calamity Jane and Delphine Seyrig: A Story*, 2019







Delphine Seyrig. Sketches for *Calamity Jane*, ca. 1982

“Undoing the Diva”: Delphine Seyrig as an Actress, or the Deconstruction of a Myth

Alexandre Moussa

Georges Pierre. Stage photograph of *L’Année dernière à Marienbad* [Last Year at Marienbad], by Alain Resnais, 1960–1961 (detail)



A Vision

"I'm not a vision—I'm a woman," Delphine Seyrig mischievously reminds Jean-Pierre Léaud at the end of François Truffaut's *Baisers volés* (*Stolen Kisses*, 1968). Yet almost thirty years after her death, for movie lovers the actress remains "a vision of something far away, . . . a reincarnation sent by acting into another life, another world."[1] This image has its roots in Seyrig's indelible association with the role that made her famous, the mysterious stranger in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*, Alain Resnais, 1961). A bob of brown hair in the style of Louise Brooks, a feathered negligée reminiscent of Marlene Dietrich in *Shanghai Express* (Josef von Sternberg, 1932), and a sophisticated acting style whose expressiveness evokes Greta Garbo: the exaggeratedly feminine actress we discovered in *Marienbad* in 1961 has nothing in common with the androgynous young woman who had played Ariel or Chérubin at decentralized regional theaters just a few years earlier, or the bohemian artist rubbing shoulders with the Beat Generation poets in Robert Frank's and Alfred Leslie's *Pull My Daisy* (1959). At a time when the filmmakers of the nouvelle vague were filming modern and sexually liberated heroines who lived in the present and inhabited realistic worlds, Seyrig presented herself as a direct descendant of the hieratic stars of the period of transition from silent to sound films, figures whom she revived in the most abstract and demanding segment of modern cinema.

1
Emmanuel Burdeau, "Delphine Seyrig pour mémoire," in *Tours de rôles: Acteurs et actrices d'un film à l'autre*, ed. Emmanuel Burdeau (Saint-Sulpice-sur-Loire, France: ACOR, 2007), 29–30.

In *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, Seyrig plays an unnamed heroine, a prisoner of the endless hallways of a vast marble palace, harassed by a man who attempts to convince her that they had been lovers one year before. Screenwriter Alain Robbe-Grillet would have preferred "someone less intelligent" for the role, someone "more carnal . . . who would have been a kind of incomprehensible statue of flesh."[2] But while the actress succeeds, through the expressiveness of her performance, in giving palpable physical and emotional life to the passive, masochistic heroine imagined by the writer, Resnais's direction constructs a structure of fascination around her (through long tracking shots, iconic lighting, and gestures of doubling and reflection) that transforms her into the sublimated incarnation of an unfathomable female otherness. *Marienbad* seems to carry to an extreme a general tendency of the new generation of French filmmakers, almost all of whom were men: the tendency to showcase as well as distance the female figures they present.[3] In *Marienbad* Seyrig finds herself caught between two competing male gazes: the sadistic gaze of Robbe-Grillet, expressed through the omnipresent and hypnotic voice of the hero seeking to substitute his memories for those of the heroine, and the fetishistic and fascinated gaze fixed upon his actress by Resnais.

Marienbad offered Seyrig an unexpected opportunity to reach a broader audience after ten years of a lackluster career in France and the United States. The film, however, became a kind

2
Roger Régent, "Alain Robbe-Grillet et le nouveau cinéma," *Art et essai,* no. 6 (November 1965): 8.

3
Geneviève Sellier, *La Nouvelle Vague: Un cinéma au masculin singulier* (Paris: CNRS, 2005).

of prison for the young actress. Two years later, when Seyrig received the Coupe Volpi for best actress for her performance in *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour* (released in English simply as *Muriel*, Alain Resnais, 1963), she was hailed for her ability to create a character entirely at odds with her image. But the princess of *Marienbad* was no less an invention than the aging antique dealer of *Muriel*. The actress would later look back and stress that "the great sophistication of the woman in *Marienbad* actually comes from an enormous awkwardness. If I had known how to make myself up, do my hair, and walk in heels, I wouldn't have had to invent every gesture, every step."[4] For the public and critics, however, Seyrig was now seen as identical with this archetypal figure close to "*la divine*" and described by Edgar Morin "as mysterious and as sovereign as the femme fatale, as profoundly pure and as destined to suffer as the young virgin."[5]

Thus, until the mid-1970s Seyrig found herself consistently relegated, in movies, to the role of the bourgeois, sophisticated, and mysterious seductress. She represents "the blonde woman of all male fantasies" and is above all a living quotation of the cinema of Resnais.[6] Hence, speaking of her collaboration with Joseph Losey on *Accident* (1967), she observes, "I became a sort of status symbol—hired to create a link with another great director and not a choice for myself."[7]

Beyond the roles themselves, the films are consistently directed in such a way as to place the actress in this position of a fantasized vision,

4
Nicole Muchnik, "Delphine Seyrig: La beauté, l'homme et nous," *Marie-Claire*, no. 301 (September 1977): 10.

5
Edgar Morin, *The Stars* (1972), trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 7.

6
Françoise Audé, *Ciné-modèles cinéma d'elles* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1981), 86.

7
Edith de Rham, *Joseph Losey* (London: André Deutsch, 1991), 232–33.

capable by her mere presence of making even the most realistic worlds become slightly unreal. Thus, her sudden appearance on screen slows down time and muffles the noise of the street in *La Musica* (Marguerite Duras and Paul Seban, 1966) and in *Accident* causes sound and image to fall temporarily out of sync. The characters she plays are often seen through the exclusive mediation of the gaze of the male protagonists and almost never endowed with a viewpoint of their own. *Baisers volés*, which was nonetheless intended as a humorous reexamination of this mythical image, is paradoxically the most representative example of it. Heralded before her appearance on screen by a dreamlike song sounding in the deserted aisles of a shoe store, in the course of the sequences Seyrig/Fabienne Tabard finds herself isolated on screen by the progressive tightening of the camera's frame. The images that sublimate her beauty alternate with reaction shots in which a stunned Léaud/Antoine Doinel loses himself in contemplation of his idol. Yet once she has served her purpose in the young Doinel's sentimental education, the only thing left for the "vision" to do is to disappear forever.

An Actress

Among the major films of the first half of Seyrig's career, *Muriel ou le Temps d'un retour* represents an exception. Here, the actress fully affirms the singularity of a dissonant style of acting, a cross between her French dramatic training under Roger

Blin, Pierre Bertin, and Tania Balachova and the working method she learned in the United States at Lee Strasberg's Actors Studio. Her performance is one of the cornerstones of the aesthetic of a film that seems to opt for the greatest possible realism but whose elliptical writing and fragmented editing reveal the other side of the consumption society of the 1960s: the ghosts of World War II and the Algerian War. In it, the actress's naturalistic strokes of inspiration are counterbalanced by a consistent stylization of gesture and expression, heightening the tension between the film's realist specificity and the unreality to which it aspires. The emotionalism of her performance is constantly undermined by its visibly "acted" quality, provoking a twofold movement of empathy and critical distance vis-à-vis a double figure at once hopelessly paralyzed by the past and complicit in the collective amnesia. The ghostlike quality of this performance is reinforced by the crystallization of its presence around a melodious voice with unpredictable diction that rises and falls in pitch from one syllable to the next and is already utilized in contrast to her body, just as it will later be in *Accident*, *Le Journal d'un suicidé* (*Diary of a Suicide*, Stanislav Stanojevic, 1971) and *India Song* (Marguerite Duras, 1975).[8]

Beyond her symbolic association with the cinema of Resnais, what made Seyrig the privileged actress of a modernist repertoire in theater as well as in film was the reflexive quality of her acting style: she acted and watched herself acting.[9] The singularity of this "presence/absence" and the

8
Joe Milutis, "She's Not There," *Film Comment* 44, no. 1 (January–February 2008): 16–18.

9
Jacqueline Nacache, "The Actor as an Icon of Presence: The Example of Delphine Seyrig," in *Acting and Performance in Moving Image Culture: Bodies, Screens, Renderings*, ed. Jörg Sternagel, Deborah Levitt, and Dieter Mersch (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012), 159–76.

recognition of her acting prowess enabled her to step out of Resnais's shadow and establish herself in the theater in her own right in the course of the 1960s, appearing in works by Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Peter Handke, and Luigi Pirandello. The rigorous standard of her artistic choices and her decisive involvement in the process of mounting the plays in which she performed (negotiating the rights, choosing her collaborators, and making revisions to the texts) belie the passive image of the languorous muse atop her pedestal. On stage but also on television, she found great tragic or comic roles that dialogue with and add complexity to her image as a diva.

Moreover, this reflexive quality of her acting also enabled the actress to gradually establish a strong critical distance from the stereotypical heroines she played. In the wake of her involvement in the events of May 1968, Seyrig began to express a certain weariness with the ethereal image she continued to have in films. She tried to shatter that image abruptly by taking a number of extravagant, highly sexualized roles that contradicted her image as a sophisticated intellectual, one of which is her character in *Mister Freedom* (William Klein, 1968). Under the camera of a director who had known her before *Marienbad*, she humorously mimics a comic strip vamp as "a whore in the service of capitalism," the central figure of this vitriolic satire of American imperialism. But this role against type was met with bitter criticism and commercial failure: "A lot of people criticized my character; they were afraid for my reputation," Seyrig later lamented.[10]

10
Gérard Langlois, "Delphine Seyrig, une actrice magique," *Les Lettres françaises*, July 16, 1969, 17.

Hence, she opted instead for the opposite strategy, embracing her image to the point of self-parody in films like *Peau d'âne* (*Donkey Skin*, Jacques Demy, 1970) and *Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie* (*The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, Luis Buñuel, 1972), which continue her role as a comic vision in *Baisers volés*. The most representative example of this subversive approach is the strange Belgian vampire film *Les Lèvres rouges* (released in English as *Daughters of Darkness*, Harry Kümel, 1971), in which Seyrig plays the character of Countess Báthory as a drag queen imitating Dietrich in a story of sexual grooming in which, in contrast to *Marienbad*, she is the hunter instead of the prey. In a magnetic performance verging on camp, she literally vampirizes the film, inverting the genre's customary lesbophobia by offering the young heroine a passion much more desirable than that which ties her to a man who beats and abuses her.[11] Seyrig thus subverts the structures of fascination assembled around her: she uses them to draw the films' focus to herself, while at the same time, with her pointedly self-conscious acting style, offering a deconstruction of the fantasized femininity with which she is associated. She highlighted this point herself with great clear-sightedness: "I have always felt close to prostitutes and transvestites. At bottom, I've always considered myself to be one of them. Because just like them I'm forced to turn myself into something other than what I am. In doing so, I don't come any closer to an image of the 'ideal woman' than would a man who dressed

11
Bonnie Zimmerman, "*Daughters of Darkness:* Lesbian Vampires," *Jump Cut*, no. 24–25 (March 1981): 23–24.

12
Muchnik, "Delphine Seyrig."

up as that same woman. We both make the same contortions."[12]

A Woman

Beginning in 1971, however, the continued pursuit of an acting career seemed more and more in conflict with the activism of a woman who publicly proclaimed her feminism. The desire to combine her profession and her convictions was initially thwarted during the chaotic filming of *Maison de poupée* (*A Doll's House*, Joseph Losey, 1973), an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's play in which she shared the bill with another important feminist spokesperson, the American star Jane Fonda. But the demand of the two actresses that the political force of the original play be preserved in the face of an adaptation they deemed misogynistic was vehemently rejected by the director and his team, the great majority of whom were men. Hence, for a time she seemed to abandon the idea of transforming the film industry, instead pursuing independent image production practices, especially video, which she discovered with Carole Roussopoulos. The resolution of this conflict between actress and activist came in 1975 with her successive roles in three major films directed by women and presented at the Cannes Festival. "I'm part of a movement that is making the masks fall away," she told *Cinématographe* at the time in an interview in which she draws a clear connection between her political commitments and her artistic choices.[13] While Marguerite Duras's

13
Pierre Maraval, "Delphine Seyrig: 'Je fais partie d'un mouvement qui fait tomber les masques'", *Cinématographe*, no. 13 (May–June 1975): 25–27.

India Song offered her a role along the same lines as her mythical image in *Marienbad*, it dilutes its fascination with the mysterious and tragic figure of Anne-Marie Stretter by making it but one viewpoint among the various female voices. In this respect, it may be seen as a kind of "countershot" to Resnais's film. *Aloïse* (Liliane de Kermadec, 1975) places the star at the center of a classical biographical film but one devoted to a marginalized figure, Aloïse Corbaz, a representative exponent of *art brut*.

The work that finally freed Seyrig from the fantasy of "the vision" is indisputably Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, which is fully the equal of *Marienbad* in its splendor and formal rigor. By choosing Seyrig for the role of this Brussels widow, a housewife forced to work as a prostitute to ensure her livelihood and that of her son, Akerman deconstructs both the star's image and the stereotypes associated with housewives and prostitutes. "Why did I choose a beautiful woman? Because men think the women who are in their houses are ugly," Akerman told the press when the film was released.[14] For the director, Seyrig's mythical aura gives an exemplary, symbolic value to the character: "If I had chosen a nonprofessional to play Jeanne, she would have been only that particular woman. Because she's an actress, she represents a lot of other women. Because she's Delphine Seyrig, she's a symbol of all women."[15] But beyond this dialogue with the star's persona, the brilliance of Akerman's approach lies in her decision to call on Seyrig's talent as an actor in a

14
Claude-Marie Trémois, "Chantal Akerman: 'À partir de quelques images de mon enfance,'" *Télérama*, January 16, 1976, 66–68.

15
Ibid.

film where her performance is as essential to the formal structure as it was in *Muriel*. Akerman's fixed, frontal camera position makes it impossible to turn the actress into an idol. Its objectivity tinged with curiosity highlights domestic gestures that are traditionally kept off-screen by conventional cinema but that here supply the very material of the cinematic narrative. At first, Seyrig completes these gestures with the precision of an automaton, with an utterly inhuman perfection, allowing the viewer to register the unconscious and repetitive routine that protects her character from madness. In the second part of the film, an orgasm and being an hour late set the fictional machine in motion by upsetting the perfectly orchestrated ballet of gestures and movements, which suddenly become clumsy and pointless. Thanks to Seyrig's contribution, these rituals of everyday life thus acquire an ornamental quality that reveals the alienation of the person carrying them out.[16]
But the distance created by this strategy and this performance does not turn the heroine into yet another figure of otherness. Instead, it is counterbalanced by the attention this strategy enables the viewer to pay to minute gestures that implicitly humanize the protagonist, as well as by subtle variations of settings and situations that echo her gradual destabilization. *Jeanne Dielman* thus marks the decisive moment Seyrig succeeds in weaving together the formal and political avant-gardes she had hitherto embodied separately: here she is no longer a vision but, finally, a woman.

16
"Ornamental" in the sense the term is used by Christian Viviani, in which a gesture attains the status of a true visual event through the synergy between actor and director. Christian Viviani, *Le Magique et le Vrai,* [Aix-en-Provence: Rouge Profond, 2015], 38–44.

Jeanne Dielman came out in theaters at a time when feminist reflection was invading the field of cinema. Critics Marjorie Rosen and Molly Haskell were denouncing the stereotyped representations of women propagated by Hollywood.[17] Laura Mulvey was deconstructing the visual structures of fascination employed by classical film.[18] And Claire Johnston was promoting the emergence of a cinema made by women that would function as a kind of "counter-cinema."[19] Seyrig's career after Akerman's film seems to continue these various strands of theoretical reflection, to which she made a major contribution of her own with her video *Sois belle et tais-toi!* (*Be Pretty and Shut Up*, 1976). In it, she conducts a kind of reflexive assessment of the previous twenty years through the testimony of twenty actresses who criticize both the stereotypical parts they tend to be offered as well as the marginal role assigned to women by the movie industry and (by extension) society itself. After this video, Seyrig favored collaborations with women directors and chose parts that contrasted sharply with her traditional roles.

Unlike the works that made her famous, which are often set in unspecified locations or times—in imaginary worlds—Seyrig's films of the 1980s (with the exception of Ulrike Ottinger's queer phantasmagorias) often take place in realistic worlds with a strong spatiotemporal grounding, the use of ordinary language, attention to everyday gestures and rituals, and fairly flat and transparent production and direction. Before *Jeanne Dielman*, Seyrig had almost exclusively played

17
Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus* (New York: Avon, 1974); and Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (New York: Penguin Books, 1975).

18
Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6–18.

19
Claire Johnston, ed., *Notes on Women's Cinema* (London: Society for Education in Film and Television, 1973).

upper-middle-class characters who were often idle or had unspecified professions and were frequently confined to romantic storylines. After that film, she played a provincial baker in *Chère inconnue* (released in English as *I Sent a Letter to My Love*, Moshé Mizrahi, 1980), an unemployed theater box office cashier in *Le Grain de sable* (Grain of sand, Pomme Meffre, 1982), and the manager of a store in a Brussels shopping mall in *Golden Eighties* (Chantal Akerman, 1986). The artificiality of Seyrig's acting style, her distinguished bearing, and the mannered quality of her diction are treated in these fictions in a way that lends complexity to her characters and injects an element of poetry into the realistic worlds of these films. Another aspect also differentiates the films Seyrig made in the 1980s with women filmmakers: the positive relationships between their female characters. In the actress's previous films, a recurring narrative framework placed her in the position of a younger woman's rival for the affections of a man who is himself often younger than she. In the films Seyrig shot with women filmmakers, her characters for the first time have female friends, and in a turn that is virtually unprecedented in her filmography she plays positive roles of mothers and female caregivers, as for example in *Le Petit Pommier* (The little apple tree, Liliane de Kermadec, 1981), which deals sensitively with the separation of a mother and a daughter on the threshold of adulthood. Finally, following on from *Aloïse*, the actress chose on several occasions, particularly on stage, to play famous women of history in works

that seek to demythologize them and reassess their importance. Thus, she starred in a play by Hélène Cixous about Sigmund Freud's first female patient (*Le Portrait de Dora* [Portrait of Dora], 1978); she played Aurelia, the supposedly suffocating mother of poet Sylvia Plath (*Letters Home*, Chantal Akerman, 1986); Cleopatra in a Shakespeare play mounted in London; and Sarah Bernhardt in a work by John Murrell directed by George Wilson (*Sarah et le Cri de la langouste* [Sarah and the cry of the lobster], 1982).

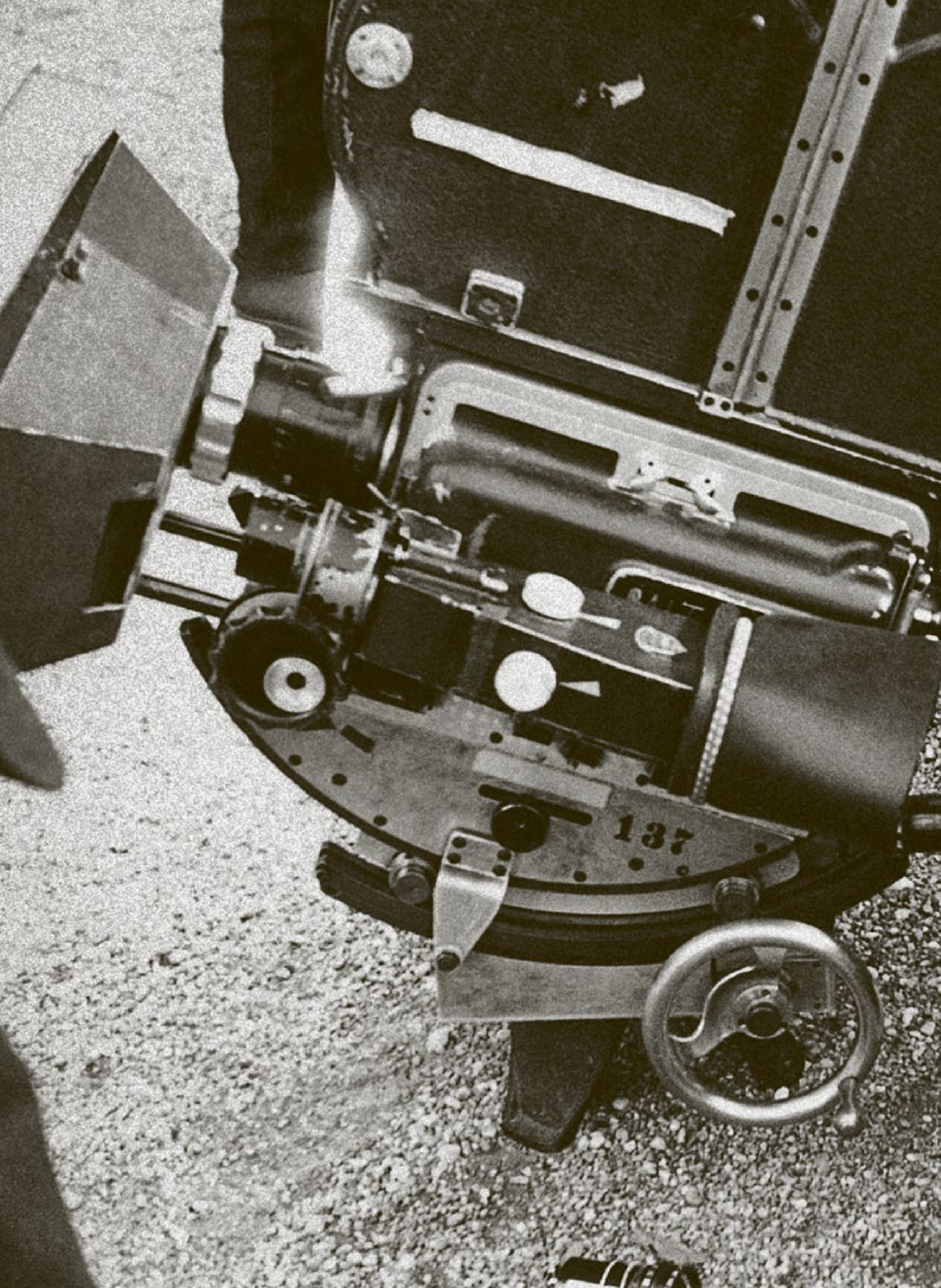
Unfortunately, this commitment had its cost. Seyrig's films of this period were distributed much less widely, if they were released in France at all. French directors cast her more and more infrequently, and she was forced to shoot in Switzerland, Belgium, Poland, or Germany and to seek refuge in theater and television, which were less unforgiving toward aging actresses. While her later films do not always live up to the daring formal innovations of her earlier career, her collaborations with Ottinger are an outstanding legacy, reaffirming her pivotal position at the crossroads of the formal and political avant-gardes. They represent an ideal conclusion to a singular career that saw the muse evolve into a creator, the ethereal diva reveal herself as a great actress in the service of the boldest theatrical and cinematic experiments of her day, and a star who too often was the on-screen embodiment of the myth of the ideal woman work to deconstruct it.



pp. 89–91:
Georges Pierre. Stage photograph of *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* [*Last Year at Marienbad*], by Alain Resnais, 1960–1961



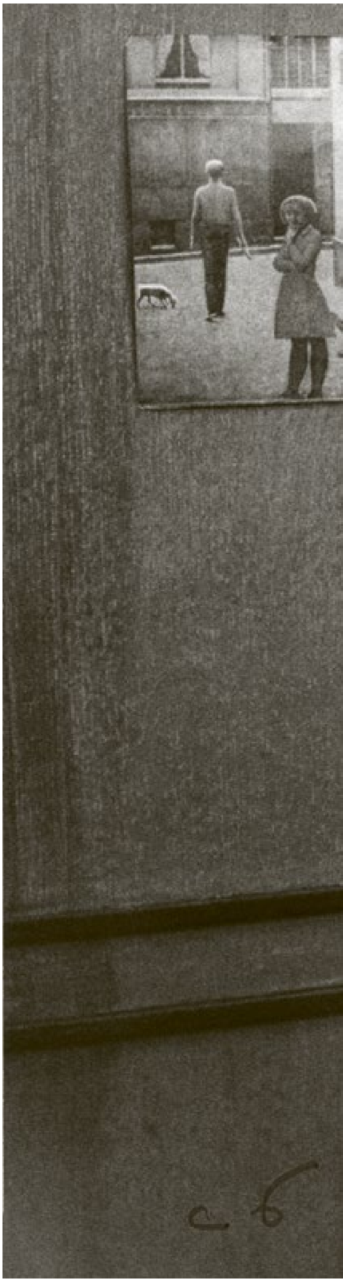



137









pp. 92–93:
Pierre Guilbaud. Stage photograph of *L’Année dernière à Marienbad* [*Last Year at Marienbad*], by Alain Resnais, 1960–1961



Liliane de Kermadec. Stage photograph of *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour* [*Muriel*], by Alain Resnais, 1963

Raymond Cauchetier. Stage photograph of *Baisers volés* [*Stolen Kisses*], by François Truffaut, 1968





Rosine Nusimovici. Stage photograph of *Aloïse*, by Liliane de Kermadec, 1974–1975

Erica Lennard. Stage photograph of *India Song*, by Marguerite Duras, 1974–1975

Stage photograph of *Mister Freedom*, by William Klein, 1968







Erica Lennard. Stage photograph of *India Song*, by Marguerite Duras, 1974–1975





Studio Lipnitzki. *To Be*, by Luigi Pirandello, at the Théâtre Antoine of Paris, 1966–1967

Stage photograph of *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du commerce 1080 Bruxelles*, by Chantal Akerman, 1975





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Cutting Up Men? Delphine Seyrig and Carole Roussopoulos's Playful Forms of Video Activism

Ros Murray

Catherine Bernheim. Delphine Seyrig holding a camera in the shooting of *Où est-ce qu'on se "mai"?* [Where should we go (to stand up for our rights)?], filmed during the May 1 demonstration, 1976, Paris (detail)



The Sony Portapak was made commercially available in France at exactly the right moment: 1968. It would go on to have a huge impact on the audiovisual representation of activist collectives, as well as the history of do-it-yourself (DIY) filmmaking in France.[1] For Delphine Seyrig, the discovery of portable video technology would propel her transition from stage and screen actress to militant feminist filmmaker. Seyrig's video work in the 1970s is impossible to consider without reference to Carole Roussopoulos, the feminist video pioneer who made more than 150 videos over a period of thirty-nine years. When Seyrig appeared one day in 1974 at Roussopoulos's studio, Rue Hippolyte Maindron, Paris, accompanied by her lifelong friend Ioana Wieder, Roussopoulos, who was deliberately oblivious to the cinema, had no idea who Seyrig was. Video activism was conceived explicitly in opposition to both film and television. For feminists, portable video offered the perfect opportunity to express themselves in a new medium that was not entrenched in male-dominated, -controlled, and -manipulated history; it could, in fact, be used against patriarchal forms of media.

1
See Anne-Marie Duguet, *Vidéo: La Mémoire au poing* (Paris: Hachette, 1981), for more information on activist video.

The way the three friends Wieder, Seyrig, and Roussopoulos engaged with the Portapak foregrounded the importance of care and communication between women, which for them always already formed the basis of all political alliances, starting with their own friendships. The

title of my article (taken from Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto*) thus seeks to draw attention not to the violence of feminist work but to the way in which it interrogates and exposes the violence inherent in patriarchal forms of media. Women do not need to "cut up men," because men are already cutting each other up. And, so, the primary tool becomes playful editing (whether through its absence or its excessive and intrusive presence). This is not so much an act of violence toward men as an act of deep and diligent care between women.

This care initially comes from mutual respect, starting with the friendship between Roussopoulos and Seyrig. Roussopoulos's failure to recognize Seyrig appealed to the actress, setting the two on an equal footing from the start. While Roussopoulos introduced Seyrig to the world of activist video, Seyrig and Wieder both had an enormous influence on Roussopoulos's feminist trajectory, with Seyrig in particular lending her books and introducing her to the work of U.S. feminists whose work was not yet available in translation. For Roussopoulos, the urge to take up portable video came from a desire to give others a chance to speak, to "privilege the perspective of the 'voiceless.'"[2] As Seyrig explains, everyone had different reasons for wanting to use video. Hers was that as an actress she was always expressing the words of others and wanted the opportunity to make her own voice heard.[3] The interlocking but different

2
Nicole Brenez, "Carole Roussopoulos ou 'l'attention créatrice,'" in *Caméra militante: Luttes de libération des années 1970*, ed. Hélène Fleckinger (Geneva: Métis Presses, 2010), 8.

3
Interview included in *Delphine et Carole, insoumuses*, dir. Callisto McNulty (France, 2018).

approaches come together most prominently in what would become the two most widely viewed videos of the 1970s feminist movement: *SCUM Manifesto* (Les Insoumuses, 1976), and *Maso et Miso vont en bateau* (Maso and Miso go boating; Les Insoumuses / Les Muses s'amusent, 1976).[4]

Characterized by their humor, their irreverence—a quality Roussopoulos and others incessantly used to describe Seyrig—and their DIY, bricoleur approach, both videos exploit play and performance, demonstrating an explicit refusal to "work" and a marked resistance to patriarchal capitalist economies. In *SCUM Manifesto*, the "Society for Cutting Up Men" may be interpreted in a new light, with the titular action being video editing. At the time, due to a lack of equipment, this typically involved crudely cutting up videotape with scissors and sticking it back together with Scotch tape. Les Insoumuses refused to do this, however, instead drawing attention to how television, as a patriarchal form of media, constantly edits and cuts up men. The content of the news reports shown in *SCUM Manifesto*, detailing wars and violence across the globe, draws attention to male violence, as does the reports' constant cutting and editing. In contrast, Seyrig and Roussopoulos's video, with the exception of two cuts toward the end, is filmed in a single take. In *Maso et Miso*, the opposite happens: it is all about editing, cutting up, reordering, inserting comments, and rewriting. For while *SCUM Manifesto* comes from

4
Roussopoulos, Seyrig, and Wieder formed Les Muses s'amusent in 1974. The name "Les Insoumuses," like many of the names of video groups (such as Vidéo Out), came by accident; in this case from a slip of the tongue by Paul Roussopoulos. The group, delighted by this slippage, took on the name. *Maso et Miso* has been referred to as a film by both Les Insoumuses and Les Muses s'amusent, who are effectively the same.

the urge to pay homage to the humorous and angry voice of someone who was unequivocally disempowered, *Maso et Miso* takes as its source Bernard Pivot's misogynist broadcast *Encore un jour et l'année de la femme, ouf, c'est fini!* (One more day until International Women's Year—oof!—is over; aired on Antenne 2 in 1975), reworked by Seyrig, Roussopoulos, Nadja Ringart, and Wieder as a feminist exposé.

The performative aspect of both videos comes across clearly in their titles, as well as the names of their collectives, with wordplay being at the heart of this political playfulness. While the title of *SCUM* refers to Solanas's own pun, *Maso et Miso vont en bateau* refers to Jacques Rivette's 1974 film *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* (*Céline and Julie Go Boating*), a film in which the protagonists quickly realize they can intervene in their own narrative.[5] The name "Les Insoumuses" recalls Frida Kahlo's often-repeated aphorism, "I am my own muse," while "Les Muses s'amusent" (The Muses Have Fun) emphasizes the importance of creating one's own reality and actively building the world one wants to live in rather than merely reflecting it.[6] This would always be expressed collectively in the plural, as the floating concluding statement of *Maso et Miso* states: "No televisual image wants or is able to represent us. We express ourselves with VIDEO." Not only were these women rallying against television and against film; they were also denouncing the auteur tradition that privileges the voice of a single (male) individual, silencing and

5
The title of Rivette's film is a play on the French idiom "aller en bateau," meaning, "to go along with someone else's story"; it could also be translated as, "to take each other for a ride."

6
Andrea Kettenmann, *Frida Kahlo, 1907–1954: Pain and Passion* (London: Taschen, 2003), 18.

rendering invisible the collaborative work inherent in any audiovisual representation.

SCUM and Reproductive Technology

SCUM Manifesto is quite unlike other feminist videos made in France at the time, many of which are documentaries that take place on the street and engage with political collectives.[7] *SCUM Manifesto* shows an intimate scene: a single fixed shot of Seyrig and Roussopoulos sitting across the table from each other in a domestic setting, the television taking center screen. *SCUM* is a conversation between two women, who, unlike the reporters on the news in the background, never directly address the camera. The interplay between different forms of media technology is immediately evident and serves to interrogate women's position in relation to reproductive media. As Élisabeth Lebovici notes, the Mouvement de libération des femmes (MLF, the French women's liberation movement) emerged "in the space between the coffee machine and the Roneo."[8] Roussopoulos also highlights women's position as typists, commenting that "women were making coffee for their Trotskyist or Maoist boyfriends, they were doing the typing, but in the meetings they never spoke."[9] The MLF was born out of a frustration with the silencing of women in political collectives during and immediately following 1968 and was about reproductive politics in more than one sense, asking, crucially, how do we reproduce

7
For example, *Les Prostituées de Lyon parlent* [The prostitutes of Lyon speak out] (Vidéo Out, 1975); *Y'a qu'à pas baiser* (Just avoid sex, 1971); and *Le FHAR* (1971).

8
Elisabeth Lebovici, *Ce que le sida m'a fait* (Paris: La Maison Rouge; Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2017), 26. "Roneo" is the trademark of a mimeograph machine produced by the American Neostyle Company for use in offices and schools.

9
Roussopoulos interview in *Carole Roussopoulos, une femme à la caméra*, dir. Emmanuelle de Riedmatten (Switzerland, 2012).

ourselves in our own words and using our own technologies? Video, as a relatively new medium, offered the perfect opportunity for this.

SCUM explicitly stages relationships between media. In the center of the image is the television, which is framed by books. As Roussopoulos types, Seyrig reads. Seyrig's presence draws out the connections to cinema, and her image questions the division between voice and body, offering an alternative representation of both. As Freddy Buache states, in *India Song* Seyrig was the iconic "voice," and in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year in Marienbad*) she was the "body."[10] In *SCUM*, however, she is offered neither as a body for the viewer's pleasurable consumption nor as a disembodied voice. In their refusal to face the viewer, Seyrig and Roussopoulos comment on the visibility of women's bodies, which themselves are so often subject to fragmentation—one of the themes of Seyrig's *Sois belle et tais-toi!* (*Be Pretty and Shut Up*). As Callisto McNulty writes, the centrality of Solanas's face on the cover of the manifesto Seyrig is reading creates a certain "audiovisual ambiguity" in which "Delphine's onscreen voice becomes a voice-off: it's Solanas who speaks."[11] Yet Seyrig is equally there, unedited, not cut up by the montage. In the intermittent focus on the television, the viewer is made aware of what would normally be invisible; namely, the ideology of editing that dictates how we perceive what we are being shown under the guise of objectivity.

10 Freddy Buache in *Delphine Seyrig: Portrait d'une comète*, dir. Jacqueline Veuve (France, 2000).

11 Callisto McNulty, "Une bande vidéo d'auteures, au féminin pluriel," in *SCUM Manifesto*, ed. Julien Bézille, Hélène Fleckinger, and Callisto McNulty (Paris: Naima, 2018), 50.

SCUM Manifesto is a performative video dealing with a performative text. Solanas's *SCUM* is about how men perform their gender. According to Solanas, the one area of "glaring superiority" of the male over the female is in public relations: "he's done a brilliant job of convincing millions of women that men are women and women are men."[12] Seyrig's reading of Solanas's text is deadpan, almost completely monotone, just as one might expect from a newsreader. In contrast, Roussopoulos overstatedly "performs" her typing before declaring, halfway through, that she is too tired to continue—a refusal to carry out gendered work. Roussopoulos then sits and smokes, a move that would surely have pleased Solanas, who argues in her manifesto that work is completely pointless and should be avoided: "SCUM will become members of the unwork force, the fuck-up force."[13]

12
Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto* (1967; London: Verso, 2004), 38.

13
Ibid., 71.

Solanas has a lot to say about reproduction. Like many other feminist writers (from Shulamith Firestone to Donna Haraway), Solanas believes in the potential of technology to serve the feminist revolution. In the second paragraph of her manifesto she declares, "it is now technically feasible to reproduce women without the aid of males (or, for that matter, females) and to produce only females. We must begin immediately to do so. Retaining the male has not even the dubious purpose of reproduction."[14] J. Halberstam, taking up the idea that reproduction serves a dubious social function, argues that Solanas is an example of "shadow feminism":

14
Ibid., 35.

"shadow feminisms take the form not of becoming, being and doing, but of shady, murky modes of undoing, unbecoming and violating."[15] The antisocial thesis in queer theory into which Solanas fits so perfectly operates a violent assault against "reproductive futurism," which was arguably also the target for feminist activists in the 1970s.[16]

Solanas's violent, antisocial impulses come from what may seem a dark and solitary place. Unlike Roussopoulos and Seyrig, she was not involved in feminist collectives and was incredibly disempowered: abused as a child, later becoming homeless, she supported herself through begging and prostitution, writing *SCUM* in 1967, shooting Andy Warhol in 1968, and subsequently spending much of her remaining life in jail and in psychiatric institutions before dying of pneumonia at age fifty-two, destitute and alone in a hospice in San Francisco.[17] The immense defiance of her words cuts through this narrative of isolation with intense fury. Yet Les Insoumuses, by impassively performing the text, putting it in a different context in relation to media activism, highlight Solanas's humor, her wittiness and incredibly effective discursive assault on the status quo. The loud clattering of Roussopoulos's "politicized recuperation of the typewriter" grates, disturbs, and disrupts.[18] It is surely also relevant that Solanas herself never abandoned it, typing defiantly and continually until the moment of her death. Roussopoulos and Seyrig's video

15
J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 4.

16
Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 3.

17
Breanne Fahs, *Valerie Solanas: The Defiant Life of the Woman Who Wrote SCUM (and Shot Andy Warhol)* (New York: The Feminist Press, CUNY), 2014.

18
McNulty, "Une bande vidéo d'auteures," 51.

is essentially a careful act, or an act of care—two women diligently reproducing the words of somebody who was out of print and whose voice needed to be heard. They are attentive to Solanas's humor, to her rage, but also to the silencing to which she was subjected, and they respond precisely to the lack of care her work received, placing their emphasis more on the need to build relationships between and among women, whether these are personal relationships or relationships that take place across what is usually assumed to be the "distance" of citation, here rendered as a form of proximity.[19]

Elsewhere in their work, Roussopoulos and Seyrig, unlike Solanas, never type, always preferring to handwrite their intertitles, as was the style among militant video collectives. The typewriter in *SCUM* is used as a prop to draw attention to women's work as a form of reproductive labor, the two reproducing Solanas in a way that says much about reproduction. Ironically, perhaps, most of Solanas's typewritten work was lost because it was burned by her mother, along with her other possessions, after she died.[20] In what seems like a move that anticipates this particularly destructive form of reproductive futurism, Roussopoulos and Seyrig opt for a form of technological reproduction that allows them to stake a claim in alternative, anti-patriarchal forms of expression.

19
I am inspired by Sara Ahmed's comments on citation as "feminist memory" or recognition of a "debt to those who came before," as well as her description of citations as "feminist bricks" from which we create our dwellings. These materials may leave us more vulnerable or exposed to criticism, but they also respond to a deep-rooted need to acknowledge, and therefore to care for, our feminist antecedents, tracing alternative genealogies—an integral aspect of Seyrig and Roussopoulos's approach. See Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 15–17.

20
Judith Coburn, "Solanas Lost and Found," *Village Voice*, January 11, 2000, https://www.villagevoice.com/2000/01/11/solanas-lost-and-found/ (accessed February 4, 2019).

Maso and Miso Take Each Other for a Ride

If *SCUM Manifesto* has a recuperative framework, *Maso et Miso*'s purpose is the opposite. The United Nations (UN) had declared 1975 to be International Women's Year, and on December 30, 1975, Antenne 2 screened Pivot's *Just One More Day until International Women's Year—Oof!—Is Over*. Pivot was a well-known television and radio talk show host in France. His special guest on December 30 was writer and journalist Françoise Giroud, who had been appointed France's secretary of state for the status of women in 1974. Pivot presented Giroud with a series of flagrant misogynists and invited her to respond in her capacity as women's secretary. While Pivot makes a mockery of women's rights, digging out the most misogynist, foulest men his producers could find—from chefs to judges, from sailors to Antenne 2's own employees (unsurprisingly, the most misogynist are those who control the media)—Giroud politely smiles and proclaims that none of these are true misogynists but, on the contrary, are simply men who love women. Les Muses s'amusent responded to Pivot and his producers by remaking the television show, inserting their own footage, and radically shifting the emphasis from light-hearted spoof to defiant exposure, the "Maso et Miso" of their title referring to Giroud's vacillation between masochism and misogyny. As Seyrig explained, "everybody dreams of being

able to respond to the television."[21] And that is exactly what they set out to do.

21
McNulty, *Delphine et Carole*.

The most disruptive element of *Maso et Miso* is its insertion of alternative temporalities into the original program. The UN's version of International Women's Year highlighted a commitment to a narrative of progress, one that, as Les Muses s'amusent emphasize, is a myth or, as they declare in the chalkboard title credits, a "mystification." The closing statement draws explicit attention to their aims: "Our purpose is to show that no woman can represent all other women inside a patriarchal government of any kind, she can only EMBODY THE FEMININE CONDITION, switching between the need to please (feminization-Maso), and the desire to claim power (masculinization-Miso)." The video thus comes from an anti-representative urge, one equally present in the group's second stated purpose, which is to use video as a weapon against television. While television claims, falsely, to "represent" women, video simply allows them to "tell their own story." Video, feminist or otherwise, cannot represent women, Les Muses s'amusent suggest, because there is no such thing as a representative voice or image. The power of video lies elsewhere, in its capacity to disrupt false representational regimes.

Pivot's program concentrates on the contemporary, showing footage of journalists interviewing men (and a few women) about what they think of International Women's Year,

of feminism, and of what women's purpose in society is. The underlying question of the program is the extent to which International Women's Year represents progress for women and the varying interpretations of what that progress might be. *Maso et Miso*, first and foremost, categorically denies any sense of progress through a variety of inventive and playful techniques. One of these is the incessant use of repetition, where idiotic comments are replayed multiple times before being questioned by homemade intertitles ("Huh? What?"). Another is the insertion of footage from contemporary protests; for example, of the MLF protesting against International Women's Year by singing, with accompanying dance moves, "3 steps forward! 3 steps back! 3 steps to the side! 3 steps to the other side! Men don't know how to put us back in step!"

When fashion designer Louis Féraud argues that women are always "out of step," Les Muses s'amusent remind us that a feminist approach is always deliberately out of step with the temporality of marching forward. In response to Giroud's reply to Féraud ("it's the language of a man who loves women"), the video cuts to footage of Seyrig, Roussopoulos, Ringart, and Wieder in the studio with their video editing equipment on display, singing "tout va très bien, Madame la Ministre, tout va très bien!" (everything is fine, Minister, everything is fine!), a *détournement* of the 1935 song often repeated

in times of blind ignorance in the face of crisis.[22] Throughout the video, anachronistic music—from Mistinguett's "C'est vrai" (It's true, 1933), to "L'Internationale" (1871), to "Vous n'aurez pas l'Alsace et la Lorraine" (You won't have Alsace and Lorraine, 1871)—is used to highlight the hypocrisy of the minister's responses. Partly a response to the singing that punctuates the program, one purpose served by these references is to historicize the events being presented. While the songs on Pivot's variety show were composed for the occasion and sung live, the moments of historical intervention in *Maso et Miso* problematize universal truths, highlighting their origins in particular historical moments and their constructed trajectories. Pivot's show ends with the song "La Femme est l'avenir de l'homme" (Women are the future of men); Les Muses s'amusent respond by arguing that women will stick with women rather than grease the wheels of a vehicle navigated by misogynists. This commitment to solidarity implies a form of temporal stickiness: a refusal to allow things to simply march on blindly. The use of anachronistic interruptions, as Elizabeth Freeman argues, may well "unsituate viewers from the present tense they think they know," causing us to radically question chrononormative frameworks.[23]

Many of the references in *Maso et Miso* are to landmarks of French national culture. In this way, Les Muses s'amusent implicitly seek to expose

22
Paul Misraki, "Tout va très bien, Madame la marquise," Warner Chappell Music, France, 1935.

23
Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 61. The term *chrononormative* is borrowed from Freeman; it refers to the way we live according to normative forms of temporality—that is, reproductive futurism, or temporalities that present themselves as natural while actively oppressing deviance.

how nationality and nationhood are caught up with patriarchal stereotypes. While this is an extremely effective démarche, it at times reveals blind spots, particularly in the equivalences drawn between racial and sexual oppression. One instance of this is a handwritten intertitle that follows the interview with Antenne 2 producer and presenter Pierre Bellemare, who justifies the lack of female presenters by arguing that it's "not a woman's job." The intertitle reads, "not a Jew's / Black's / Arab's job," drawing equivalences between the oppression of women and that of France's Jewish and racialized "others." While this is a gesture toward the recognition that the struggle against gender oppression is just as important as the struggle against racial oppression, it simultaneously potentially fails to recognize that women's struggles are informed by a variety of perspectives and needs, themselves historically situated.[24]

24
Some of these issues about the specificity of racial oppression are addressed in other videos by Seyrig, Weider, Ringart, and Roussopoulos; for example, *Grève à* Jeune Afrique (Strike at *Jeune Afrique*, 1972), *Flo Kennedy: Portrait d'une féministe américaine* (Flo Kennedy: Portrait of an American feminist, 1982), *Les Racistes ne sont pas nos potes, les violeurs non plus* (The racists are not our friends, and the rapists aren't either, 1986).

One of the central metaphors of the video is the boat, and through the various guises this metaphor takes, viewers may perceive another prism through which to interrogate the intersection of race and gender. The boat metaphor points toward a moment that does not simply march forward but allows backward movements, reinsertions, and disruptions of narrative. The first handwritten title card, announcing the title of the film, floats by, evoking the to-and-fro movements of a lilting boat. Maso and Miso are egging each other on, following

each other's stories despite knowing them to be false. The initial intertitles are repeated in various chapter headings, such as "chapter X: Maso learns to sail, or the slave ship" and "chapter XXVI, where we can conclude that when Miso and Maso go boating, it is Maso who falls off the ship."[25] A decisive moment in Pivot's program follows the interview with Marc Linski, author of a book called *La Voile sauvage* (The wild veil). Pivot, in an attempt to provoke Giroud, asks her whether Christopher Columbus would have "discovered" America if women had been on the ship. Giroud responds, "there is something in men that pushes them to go further, higher, faster. Undeniably, they're driving progress." Les Muses s'amusent's response is to rewind the tape and replay, before inserting one of their chalkboard questionnaires. Precisely at this moment, in a microcosm of the operation of the whole tape, they expose the myth of "discovery" as being driven by patriarchal, colonial urges dependent on the fictitious temporality of progress, which should be undone. That is, they operate temporally as members of SCUM's "fuck-up force."

In both *SCUM* and *Maso et Miso*, editing is an explicitly political tool of "unwork." In *SCUM* work is simply denied in favor of listening, retranscribing, and reproducing by other means, in a refusal to cut women up. In *Maso et Miso*, Les Muses s'amusent take up the knife (Solanas: "if SCUM ever strikes, it will be in the dark with a six-inch blade"), persistently and unremittingly

25
On the MLF's comparison of women's oppression to slavery, see Françoise Vergès, *Le Ventre des femmes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2017), 167, 186.

rewriting the invisible histories that underwrite television, while demonstrating the importance of feminist caring.[26] The most essential aspect of this unwork is its accessibility and inclusivity, its consistent urge to show that anyone can participate. While some histories are potentially conflated in Les Muses s'amusent's video, they also invite us to intervene in the debate, to participate and take an active position—to unwork their own unworking. In Solanas's words, we are all capable of this: "dropping out is not the answer; fucking-up is."[27]

26
Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, 76.

27
Ibid., 75.



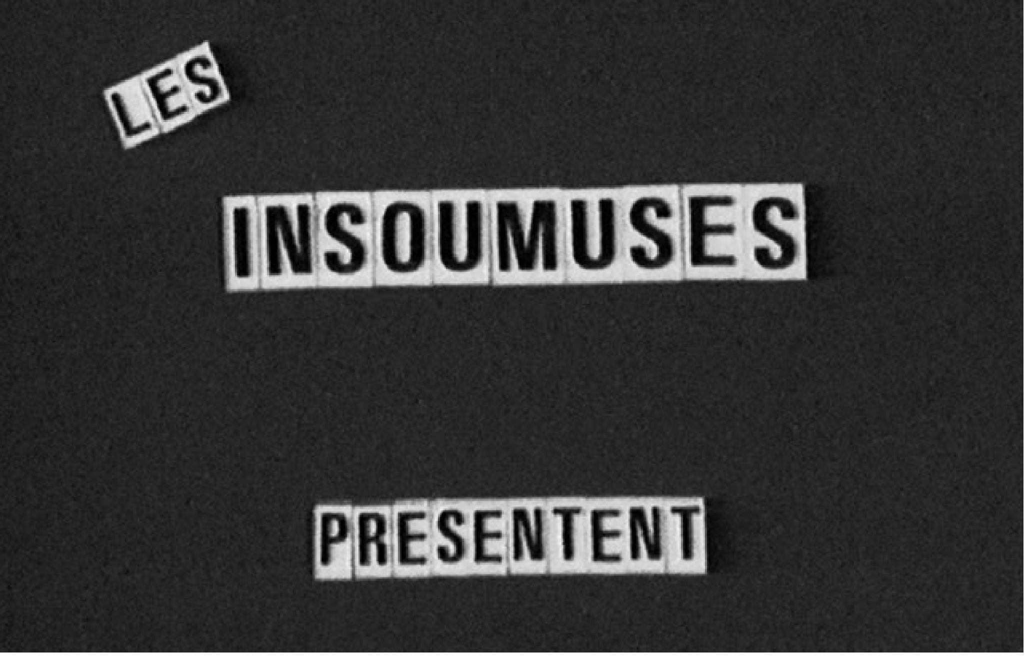
Carole Roussopoulos and Delphine Seyrig, *SCUM Manifesto*, 1976

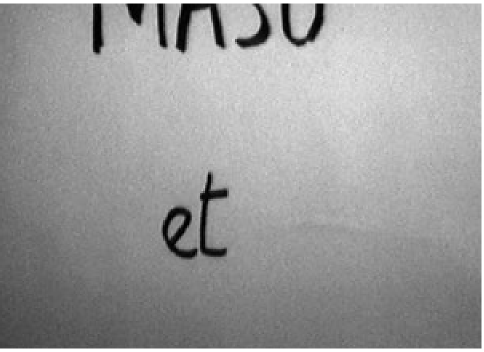


Carlos Santos. Agnès Varda and Delphine Seyrig during a feminist demonstration in Paris, 1971

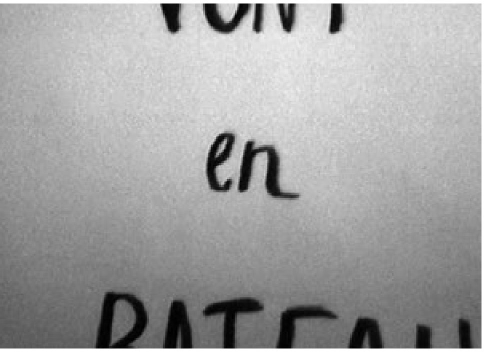


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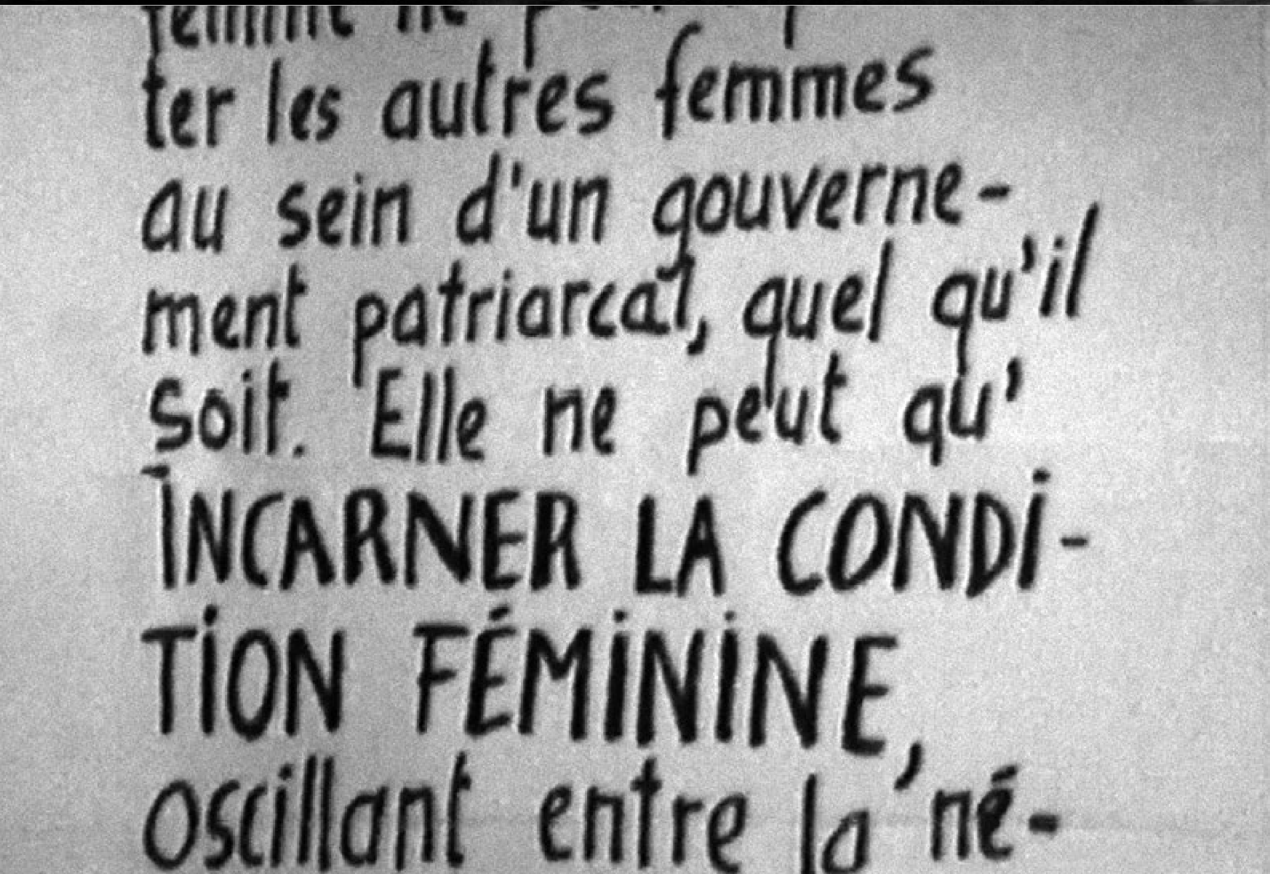


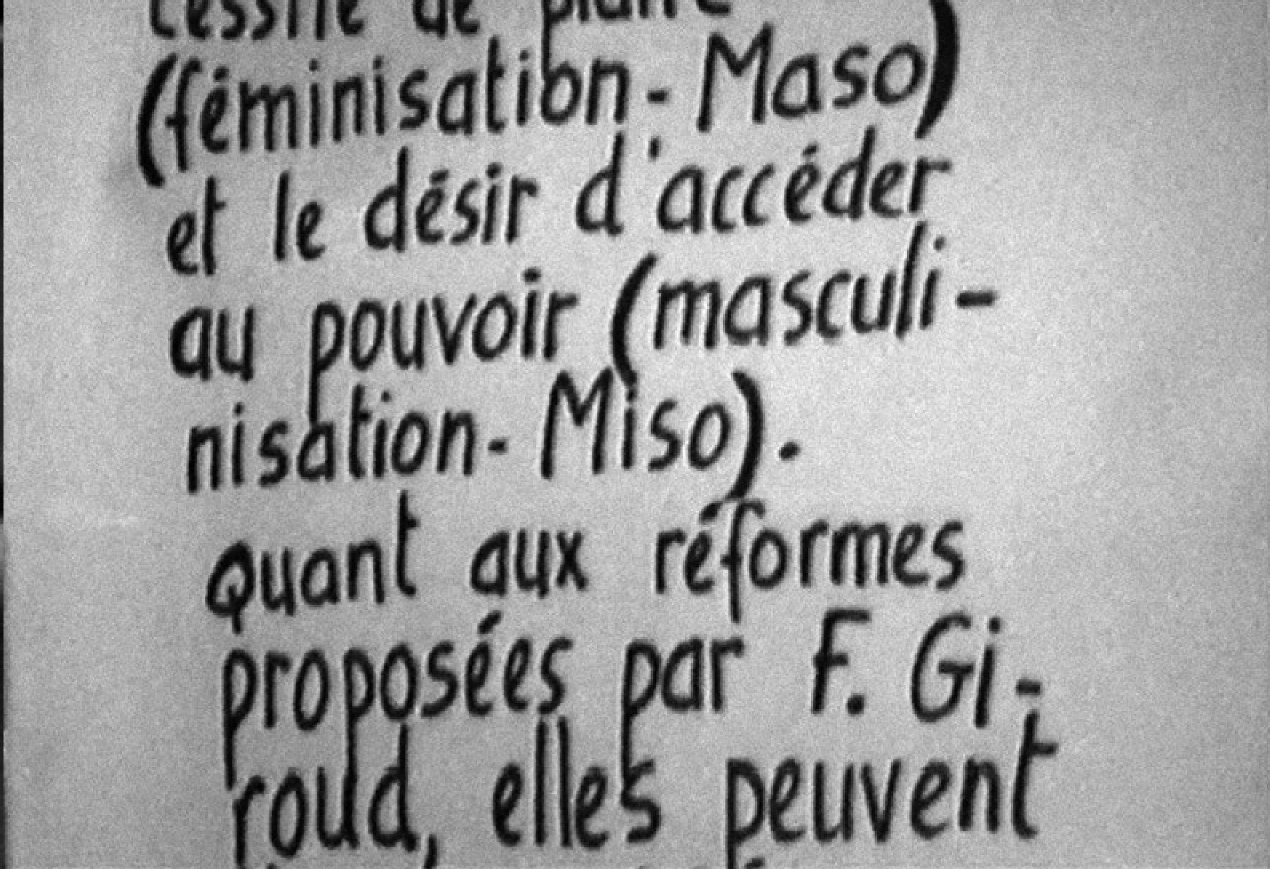
8 Mars 1975

MARCHE CONTRE

L'ANNÉE DE LA FEMME




ter les autres femmes
au sein d'un gouverne-
ment patriarcal, quel qu'il
soit. Elle ne peut qu'
INCARNER LA CONDI-
TION FÉMININE,
oscillant entre la né-



(féminisation - Maso)
et le désir d'accéder
au pouvoir (masculi-
nisation - Miso).
quant aux réformes
proposées par F. Gi-
roud, elles peuvent

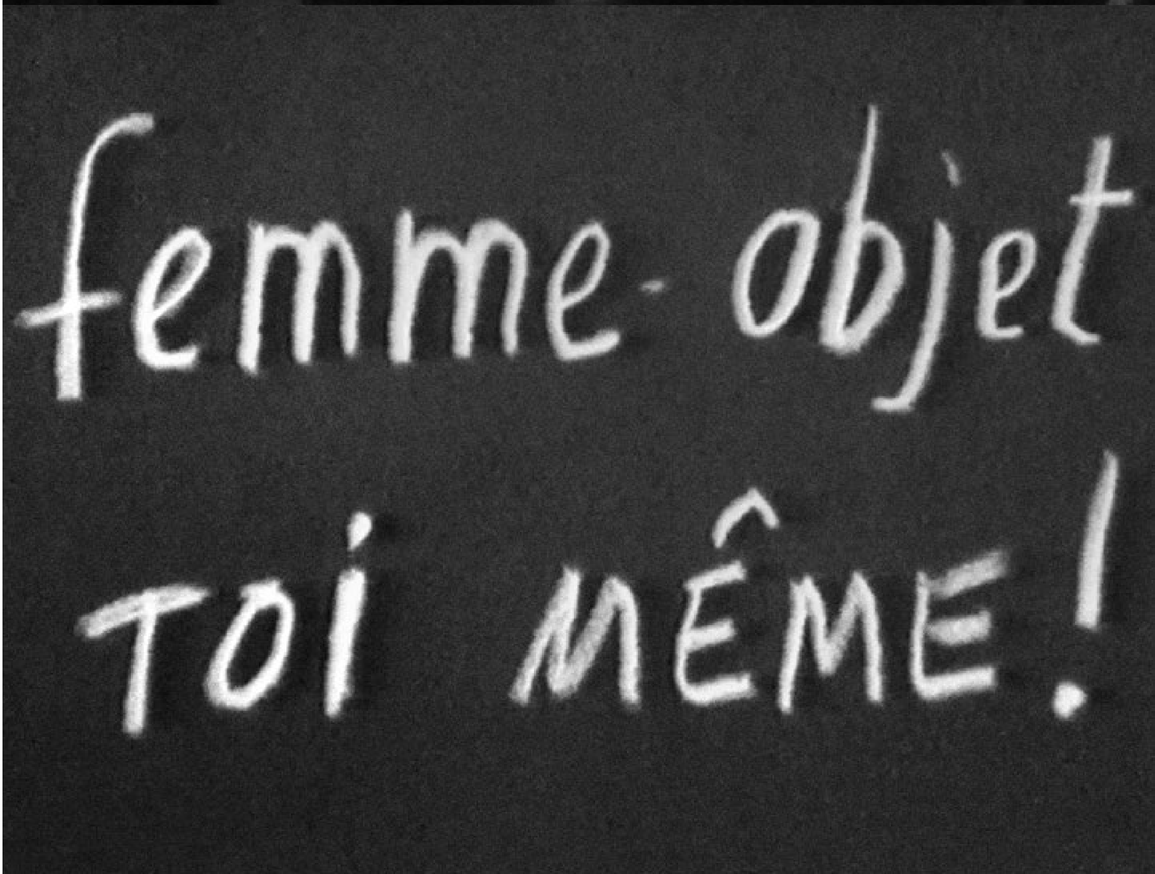




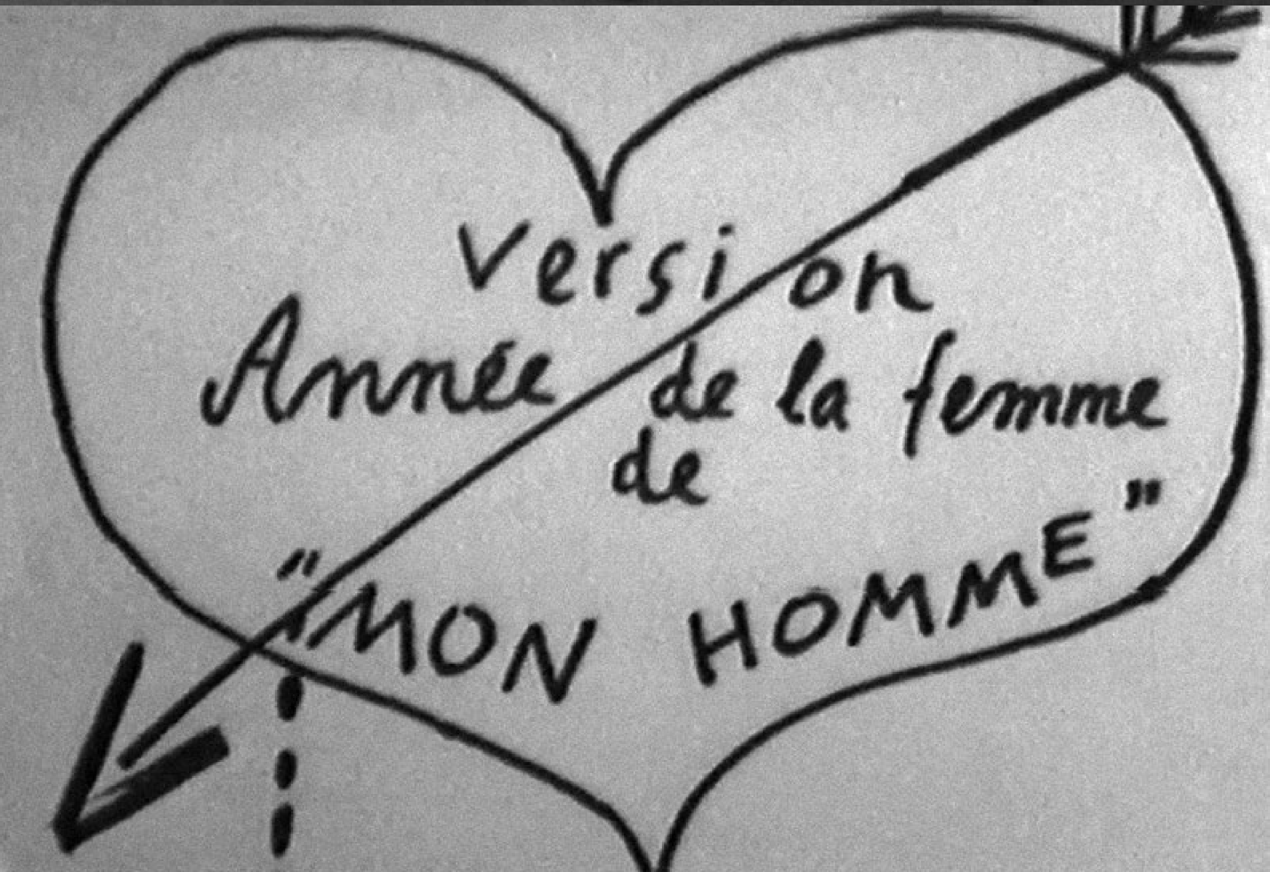
Nadja Ringart, Carole Roussopoulos, Delphine Seyrig, and Ioana Wieder
Maso et Miso vont en bateau [Maso and Miso go boating], 1976

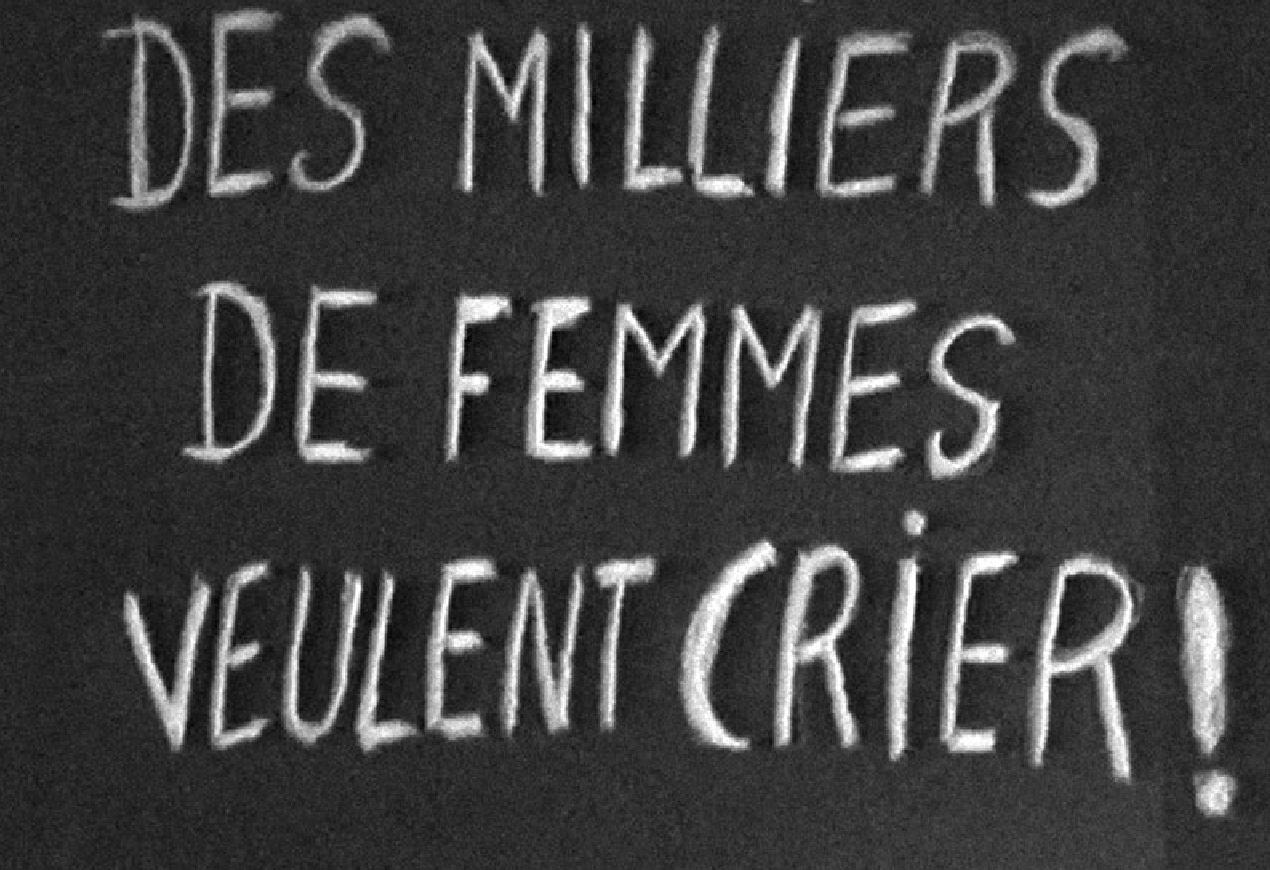





femme-objet
toi même!




Version
Année de la femme
de
"MON HOMME"


DES MILLIERS
DE FEMMES
VEULENT CRIER!







Catherine Bernheim. Delphine Seyrig holding a camera in the shooting of *Où est-ce qu'on se "mai"?* [Where should we go (to stand up for our rights)?], filmed during the May 1 demonstration, 1976, Paris

To Be a Woman, Not a Vision
Delphine Seyrig's Feminist Quest

Françoise Vergès

Carlos Santos. Agnès Varda and Delphine Seyrig during a feminist demonstration in Paris, 1971(detail)


AS LA MEDECINE DE CLASSE

In the role of Fabienne Tabard, the wife of the manager of the shoe store where Antoine Doinel works in François Truffaut's *Baisers volés* (*Stolen Kisses*, 1968), Delphine Seyrig says, "I'm not a vision—I'm a woman." Being a woman was not something that went without saying when Seyrig spoke these words, and that is still the case today, with the category "woman" still so hemmed in by conflicting injunctions, expectations, and social demands. For Seyrig, the question arose not only in her personal life but in her capacity as an actor called upon to play female characters in an industry dominated by white men. If a woman was neither a vision nor an image, what was she? To answer this question, feminists turned to psychoanalysis, the classical theoretical texts, and history. In the realm of psychoanalysis, the rereading of the major texts led to an extensive set of writings that challenged their underlying patriarchal notions and their assumptions regarding female sexuality. Thus, the case of "Dora," one of the young women analyzed by Sigmund Freud, was the subject of a number of rereadings. While Freud regarded Dora's love for Mrs. K. merely as a manifestation of hysteria and of a repressed desire for Mr. K., for many feminists his analysis reflected both the refusal of psychoanalysis to take seriously what at the time was still called "female homosexuality" and its tendency to view this as no more than the crushes of young girls or women. (Seyrig was later invited by Antoinette Fouque, who led the group Psychanalyse et politique within the Mouvement de libération des femmes, MLF, to play Mrs. K. in a film that was

never completed.) Jacques Lacan's assertion that "woman does not exist" was the focus of intense discussions, and important works were published by psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray, who opposed the Lacanian theses. She insisted on the existence of sexual difference in language and advanced the hypothesis that there is a language of men and a language of women and that the language of men is not the language of all humanity. Female desire, she wrote, is a lost civilization whose language is no longer known today. Monique Wittig and other MLF activists contributed their own analyses alongside these rereadings. The theoretical texts—by Simone de Beauvoir, Clara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg, the women of the Paris Commune, Vladimir Lenin, Friedrich Engels, and Karl Marx—were also submitted to close rereadings. Beauvoir's dictum that "one isn't born a woman but rather becomes one" was minutely analyzed and tested against psychoanalysis and history. In the area of history, feminists worked to revive and bring attention to the unseen, unread women who had played roles in historical revolutionary struggles and written manifestos or other texts. During these years, the intense debates on sexuality, motherhood, the category "women," and the image of women in advertising and film opened up new theoretical fields. The statement "I'm not a vision—I'm a woman" could sum up both Seyrig's own quest and that of numerous feminists.

The women's groups that made up the MLF in the 1970s challenged male injunctions regarding female beauty, female duty, motherhood, and

sexual expression. Nor did they overlook the social dimension, denouncing sexual harassment and the fact that women were paid less than men and prevented from filling important posts and that all these positions of power were occupied by men. Seyrig fully supported these views. As an MLF activist, she spoke out in favor of abortion rights, equal pay for equal work, and an end to discrimination. During a debate broadcast in 1972, she criticized on live TV a right-wing minister who said that women would use abortion to abuse their sexual freedom.[1] That same year, on an interview broadcast on French television, she analyzed the situation of women and took up one of the fundamental feminist arguments: that marriage turns women into servants; that is, that by marrying a woman a man acquires a free housekeeper.[2] To the interviewer, Seyrig declared, "I know what it is to be a slave. Hence it's only natural that I would be involved in a movement, [since] we don't know what a woman's identity is. We've never seen what a woman would be if she weren't shaped by everything she's been taught to be since she was old enough to speak." Becoming a woman is a movement, a process—admittedly one that is full of obstacles and pitfalls, since as soon as a little girl can speak patriarchal society will operate a division within her—but that process is paradoxically what will enable her to become an emancipated woman who understands how and why imposed norms are hindering her. Seyrig uses the word *racism* to talk about the fact that women are seen as lesser beings. That is, she regards the

1
"Delphine Seyrig sur l'avortement," INA.fr video, 2:29, from an episode of *Actuel 2*, October 13, 1972, http://www.ina.fr/video/I15264648/delphine-seyrig-sur-l-avortement-video.html (accessed June 25, 2019).

2
"Marie Laforêt et Delphine Seyrig parlent du bonheur, de la beauté, des femmes 1972," Daily Motion video, 9:47, from an interview originally broadcast on the program *Samedi Loisirs*, September 30, 1972, posted by "sylvainsyl," ca. 2011, https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xkskof (accessed November 19, 2018).

inferior status imposed on white French women as a kind of racism. She continues, “the point is that women want to take charge of themselves,” to which the female journalist replies, “Isn’t there a bit of racism in that notion?” Seyrig responds indignantly: “Where is the racism? Who is it that segregated women? Why can’t women go out on the street at midnight? Who commits the rapes? Who is doing the segregating?” She then moves on to the obligation of motherhood and marriage as a form of prostitution and concludes by describing the feelings of frustration that, for a majority of women, are reaching a breaking point. The journalist then suggests that “the aggressiveness of the MLF” does not make it particularly “appealing,” to which Seyrig retorts that she is not sure men’s coolness and composure is all that “appealing.” Years later, in 1985, she explained that she had come to feminism after reading the writings of American women in the 1960s and then hearing that women’s groups were meeting in Paris.[3] She spoke of a “revelation” and added that this revelation had been an invaluable contribution to her work as an actor, since it had helped her to understand why she refused certain requests by film or theater directors. In all her interviews, filmed or recorded, Seyrig discusses her feminism in a clear and confident voice and does not add, as so many do, as if by way of apology, that she is a feminist but has nothing against men! Seyrig’s feminism is close to that of Beauvoir; it centers on male domination, on the fact that women are men’s “slaves,” and on what will later be called “gender equality” (i.e., on the battle

3
“Delphine Seyrig à propos de son engagement dans le MLF,” INA.fr video, 2:49, from an episode of *Aujourd’hui la vie*, May 14, 1985, http://ina.fr/video/I14365785/delphine-seyrig-a-propos-de-son-engagement-dans-le-mlf-video.html (accessed June 25, 2019).

against the discrimination that women are subjected to because they are women). Hers is a feminism that says "women" and "men" and analyzes the world on the basis of these two distinct categories. It says nothing about the fact that these men are white men, that male domination is also racial domination, that racism and sexism travel together, and that capitalism, the state, and patriarchy intersect and combine and sometimes oppose one another but will never seek to dismantle the regime they have worked to establish. It is a feminism that is sharply criticized by feminists of the Third World and racialized (*racisées*) women of the North for ignoring the fact that male domination is racialized, that a black, Asian, or Arab man may be a domestic tyrant but will always have a social and economic status inferior to that of a white man. And yet it is a feminism that purports to be staunchly anti-imperialist.

These opening remarks set the context for my acceptance of the invitation to contribute to this catalogue. On the one hand, I view that invitation as an opportunity to reconsider this feminism; on the other hand, I see it as an occasion to reexamine the activist feminist cinema in which Seyrig played an important role. What continue to interest me are the overlappings and intersections, tensions and contradictions between the feminist movement in France and decolonial movements in the French colonial empire. Where do French feminist film and the cinema of the decolonization struggles intersect?

When the women of the MLF began to think about filming their struggles, they had an archive at their

disposal. They had access to the innovative, original (in both its methods and objectives) filmography of the national liberation struggles. More than the French army's war in Indochina, the war waged in Algeria against the movement of national liberation gave rise to this cinema. The war mobilized French and Algerian filmmakers, who sought to counter the French colonial narrative and its representations, to give a face to the Algerian nationalists, to the soldiers in the mountains and cities, the refugees, and the victims of torture. To demonstrate the unjustness of the war and the legitimacy of the Algerians' nationalist struggle, this critical cinema also sought to show the French the savagery of their army, which was using methods reminiscent of the Gestapo. Innovative and original, this cinema illustrated the brutality of the war and the justness of the Algerian nation's independence struggle. It was the filmmaker's duty to denounce this war. (She was duty bound not only to promote the ideals of liberation but to invent a new way of filming, looking, and showing rooted in a perspective that was radically critical of colonial cinema, which continued to propagate racist images and drew on screenplays and scenarios that reinforced the ideology of white supremacy. The struggles against colonialism paved the way for a cinema of liberation, for the production of films that celebrated those struggles, denounced French colonialism, and gave Africans roles that were not those of the hegemonic racist cinema. As editors, screenwriters, sound engineers, and actors, women took part in this revolution, which began with the first films by African filmmakers or the films of

René Vautier. Whether they dealt with the Algerian war directly or indirectly, most of the films about it were banned by the government. Activist cinema was clandestine.

The French feminists who reached for their cameras followed the principles established by these filmmakers. They set out to build an archive of their struggles and to counter a film industry that locked women into roles that reduced them to sexual objects or props, passive women or cheating wives and lovers, and to challenge an industry that did not allow them to be team leaders. They also joined an already existing movement to reappropriate storytelling and technique. Their movies were met with misogynistic protests and sexist snickering. The short films that explain how to perform an abortion at home—the procedure continued to be criminalized until 1975—were viewed in secret. The atmosphere was that of a guerilla cinema, like that which had characterized the years of the Algerian war. Nevertheless, a shift occurred in this decade. While misogyny remained a powerful force, while women's films were mocked or ignored by critics, and while white men continued to dominate political parties, unions, and the world of art and culture, a transformation took place. Some on the left began to realize that, while their indifference to feminist struggles might not be the expression of a contemptuous rejection, it was encountering resistance in the left's own ranks and it was time to reform their sexism. Some on the right recognized that they needed to integrate the feminist struggles while at the same time pacifying them and blunting

their radicalism. They did this in the years of French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, when the government, often against the protests of its own camp, "modernized" society by simultaneously taking a neoliberal turn and acquiescing to social demands. This reformist attitude on both left and right did not emerge without difficulty, and for years the MLF continued to be perceived as a movement of hotheads and frustrated women who did not like men. But the tide was rapidly turning against an exclusive posture of open repression. As for the social movements, their members had difficulty acknowledging their debt to the anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist movements, which had pushed them beyond their European provincialism. They essentially failed to analyze their own coloniality or the historical paternalism of the left, which Aimé Césaire had pointed out as early as 1956, highlighting the "boomerang effect" in which the left's thought was contaminated by the racism of colonialism and proslavery ideology. Frantz Fanon did not hesitate to criticize the French left quite harshly for its desire to dictate to the Algerian people the content and form of their struggle. In the 1970s, anti-colonialists from the Antilles and Réunion would continue to criticize the blindness of the French left and its ongoing pursuit of colonialism in other forms, including neocolonialism, Françafrique, and imperialist interventions.

Although social movements, including the feminist movement, were highly critical of the parties and the unions, they did not attempt to decolonize themselves. The intersection between the

anti-colonial and feminist struggles, however, was undeniable, particularly in the realm of cinema, which is our focus here. This is a subject that deserves to be better studied, through a lens that would draw on postcolonial and decolonial feminist theories and visual studies and leave behind the framework of the history of film as recounted by the classical historiography or that of the *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Where did feminist and anti-imperialist cinema intersect? What do the trajectories of the major figures of French feminist film have to teach us? What did feminist filmmakers learn from anti-colonialist cinema?

As a passionate lover of film, I tried to see movies every week when growing up, but that was difficult to do on my island, Réunion, where all the films shown to the public first had to pass a censorship board that decided what the island's inhabitants were permitted to see. This committee, which included the prefect and the bishop, primarily gave its approval to ancient and historical epics, B movie westerns, horror movies, and North American propaganda films, banning most anti-colonialist films and films of the French New Wave and Italian neorealism. The board even sought to prohibit the screening of Costa-Gavras's *Z*, which was deemed too subversive. Since I went to the movies every week, I learned everything there was to know about B movies. But thanks to my mother, who was an avid film buff and took me to the only two film clubs on the island that met in private homes—where one could hear the peculiar sound of the projector—I also had access to Russian, Italian neorealist, and

New Wave cinema. Later, in Algiers, where I lived for two years, my constant visits to the Cinémathèque d'Alger, one of the major venues for film, rounded out my cinematic education. But activist cinema had already entered my life in the early 1960s. In 1962, Yann Le Masson—who in 1961 with Olga Poliakoff had made *J'ai huit ans* (I'm eight years old), an 8 mm documentary (subsequently banned by the French government) describing the war through the drawings of an Algerian child—came to Réunion to film the impending contest between Michel Debré and the anti-colonialist movement, in which my parents were very active and which had been a part of my life since childhood. A fervent champion of keeping Algeria in the French colonial empire, Debré had been sent by the French government to defeat the anti-colonial movement. Le Masson's team had been contacted by the Communist Party of Réunion (PCR) to bring attention to this fight, which followed directly on from the Algerian struggle. This was the plan for shooting the film: the team would introduce themselves to Debré's campaign (without mentioning their ties to the PCR), gain its trust, and film Debré up close. Le Masson and his team secretly came to my family's home to meet with leaders of the PCR and keep them updated. After a few weeks spent filming Debré's campaign—capturing moments of paternalism on the part of the candidate; groups of white Creole men, large landowners, surrounded by bodyguards in dark glasses; marches of young anti-Communists singing "La Marseillaise" at the top of their lungs; and token blacks carrying signs

that said “Moscow’s darlings”—Le Masson and the rest of his team publicly went over to the side of the PCR’s campaign. The result was *Sucre amer* (Bitter sugar, 1963), which was immediately banned by the French government and could be screened only in secret. This was my first real-world encounter with cinema. I was a preadolescent girl who wanted to become an editor, and I was following in the footsteps of a real filmmaker who had made activist films about the Algerians! My love for film found its object there: a cinema with “camera in hand.”

After I moved to Algeria, where I finished high school, my passion for film found its privileged haunt in Algiers at the Cinémathèque. I soon knew its address by heart, especially because the wide street that runs from Place de la Grande-Poste to Bab El Oued was named after Larbi-Ben-M’hidi, the political and military leader of the Front de libération nationale (National Liberation Front) for the Algiers region, who was paraded before the press by the French army on February 23, 1957, the day after his arrest, with his hands and feet shackled. To his jailors, who declared that his capture meant the loss of the Battle of Algiers, indeed the war of independence itself, he responded “Don’t you believe it!” and hummed the “Chant des partisans” (Song of the partisans): “My friend, if you fall, / A friend steps from the shadows / And takes your place.” He was tortured and executed, but the army claimed he had committed “suicide,” an assertion that no one believed. A symbolic link was thus forged between the anti-colonial struggle and a cinema that, while it also produced love stories and individual

adventures, was searching for other forms of storytelling, subverting linear narrative, and showing complex characters in all their humanity in order to deconstruct the stereotyped images of blacks, Arabs, slaves, and oppressed people purveyed by Western films. I spent an incredible amount of time at this venue managed by Ahmed Hocine, whose facade announced its function in Arabic, Tifinagh, and French. Filmmakers flocked there from all over the world, and I listened to them transfixed: Jacques Mélo Kane, Mamadou Sarr, and Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, the makers of *Afrique sur Seine* (Africa on the Seine, 1955), Glauber Rocha, Joris Ivens, Melvin Van Peebles . . . Thus, when I arrived in France in the early 1970s, activist feminist cinema took its place alongside the films that had already trained my eye and my critical acumen. I was already interested in activist film. I knew Jacqueline Meppiel, an editor of that cinema, quite well, and I met Med Hondo and other filmmakers from the Global South.

Despite my passion for cinema, I did not join the feminists making films when I arrived in France. That was a missed opportunity. I did not meet the feminist and anti-imperialist activist Carole Roussopoulos, who filmed the feminist movement and founded the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir with Ioana Wieder and Seyrig in June 1982. In 1969, Roussopoulos had decided to support the struggles of the decade. She had filmed the Palestinians, Jean Genet and his declaration of support for Angela Davis, and the striking workers, and she had taught video classes to the revolutionary movements in the Congo and in Algiers, including to members of

the Black Panther Party. Her films were the kind that took a stand and recorded the struggles. But we will never know what she owed to the Palestinians, the Congolese, or the Black Panthers. Simply reporting what Roussopoulos filmed without asking what that taught her—how to hold the camera, whether to do close-ups, how to show the activists on screen—perpetuates a North/South geography in which everything flows in only one direction. But how can we know if she gained anything when the narrative is mutilated, when no effort is made to determine what was transmitted in the other direction, whether those encounters altered her gaze or taught her an approach to filming the anti-colonial struggles that she could put to use in recording those of the feminists? Speaking of Seyrig, her friend, Roussopoulos said in 2009, “She was very irreverent. Just because someone was famous or important, that didn't mean you had to clam up or get down on your knees and be thankful. On the contrary, you always needed to hold your head high and put the priority on getting your convictions across. Delphine had an incredible sense of humor, imagination, and energy, and she was always ready to organize a demonstration or an action or make a video.”[4] That is, she was an activist. But here again, our curiosity is left unsatisfied: what did she learn from her proximity to the Black Panthers and the anti-colonial activists, this actor who appeared in films opposing the Algerian war?

Seyrig's feminism was inseparable from her desire to change the way women are depicted in the movies. Her association with Roussopoulos and

4
Hélène Fleckinger, “Une révolution du regard: Entretien avec Carole Roussopoulos, réalisatrice féministe,” *Nouvelles Questions féministes* 28 (2009): 98.

the creation of the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir make her one of the figures who paved the way for the feminist films of the second half of the twentieth century. By starring in Chantal Akerman's film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), she took part in a historic event of feminist cinema. She continued her movement toward becoming a woman.

Nevertheless, if I had to ask a question, it would be this: Why is it that the boomerang effect of slavery and colonialism described by Césaire in his *Discours sur le colonialisme* (*Discourse on Colonialism*) was never a problem for French feminism? Why did studying how racism crept into even progressive theories and practices—not the brutal racism of the far right but the kind that sprang from a profound ignorance of the mechanisms of racial ideology—not mobilize these women, not disturb them to the point that they wanted to respond to it? When Seyrig, in her 1972 interview for *Samedi Loisirs*, invokes racism and segregation to describe the discrimination and inferior status imposed on French women, the ease with which she uses these terms without acknowledging the realities to which they refer raises questions.[5] Yes, in 1972, French women were still enormously dependent on their husbands. They were regarded as lesser beings incapable of occupying certain positions or mastering certain branches of knowledge, but Seyrig's use of the terms *racist* and *segregation* shuts out the brutal and murderous reality to which those terms point. Segregation was the legal system that prohibited blacks of

5
"Marie Laforêt et Delphine Seyrig parlent du bonheur."

the U.S. South from using the same entrances, bathrooms, and restaurants as whites; banished them to the back of the bus; made it legitimate to publicly execute them with complete impunity in lynchings that were treated as spectacles for families and children; and continued to justify a policy of murdering and denying them their rights into the 1970s. And what about black people in France? When Seyrig says that women are slaves, she is using an analogy that has been part of European feminism since the eighteenth century and that erases the racial and colonial dimension of slavery. Words matter, and the ease with which white feminists use terms like *slavery*, *racism*, and *segregation* needs to be critically analyzed. Their use betrays a profound incomprehension of the history of enslaved black women, colonized women, and racialized women. The fact that (white) women suffer domination at the hands of (white) men does not absolve them of the racist crimes committed in Europe's name—yesterday in the name of the civilizing mission and today in the name of women's rights.

In 1962, the MLF embraced the map of France imposed by the hegemonic narrative, that of a country shorn of its colonies, a postcolonial country in which French women could now play the role of the primary victims of oppression, obscuring the fact that slaves and colonized peoples were infinitely more deserving of that title—crushed, discriminated against, deported, and deprived of rights described as "universal." In doing so, the movement insulated itself against a necessary reflection on the traces of

colonialism in its history. From then on, borrowing the vocabulary of the liberation movements would be a means of reproducing the erasure, forgetting, and censorship of the struggles of enslaved and colonized women. Nevertheless, like the opposition to slavery that served as the template for eighteenth-century European feminism and still provides discursive weapons to the feminism of the twenty-first, anti-colonialism and anti-racism did offer theoretical tools to twentieth-century European feminism. Why do examples of French feminist films that are staunchly critical of French imperialism not immediately spring to mind? This absence, which I keep pointing out not to place blame (which would serve no political purpose) but in order to redress, is one that continues to haunt European feminism, one of whose recent manifestations, femonationalism, defends Islamophobia in the name of women's rights.

Seyrig was an engaged activist. She was virtually the only public figure to support the Coordination des femmes noires. She was one of the founders of the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir, which helped to produce a filmography of the feminist struggles, including a film on the Nairobi Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women in which the filmmakers spend little time on the official meeting but focus on the feminist activists, including Davis, Palestinian women, and the South American feminists.[6] The center also produced portraits of activist women such as Flo Kennedy (1982); *Les Racistes ne sont pas nos potes, les violeurs non plus* (The racists are not our friends, and the

6
Françoise Dasques, *La Conférence des femmes—Nairobi 85*, color film, 60:00, 1985.

rapists aren't either, 1986), a documentary by Anne Faisandier, Wieder, Claire Atherton, and Nadja Ringart in response to the debates regarding rape; and Nicole Fernández Ferrer, Houria Debbab, and Houria Ouad's *Des femmes maghrébines créent des emplois* (North African women create jobs, 1986).

What is it that had to not be seen, not be perceived as a danger or threat for the decolonization of European feminism not to be experienced as an urgent imperative? Only by reexamining the history of the MLF, the reactions it provoked, and the counterrevolution that sought to turn feminisms white and to devalue the struggles of women in the national liberation movements will we accord Seyrig—the one who wanted to be a woman—the place she deserves in this rewriting. Continuing to harness the study of feminist film to the goal of incorporating it into the pantheon of French cinema and of admitting feminist filmmakers into that pantheon certainly seems to be legitimate as a reparation for forgetting and erasure. But could we make the effort to imagine what a decolonial narrative of French feminist cinema would look like? Its aim would not be to add forgotten chapters or to take figures, hitherto invisible, who do not challenge the framework of the narrative and make them visible. It would be to engage a multidimensional analysis of European feminist film by identifying what it borrowed from the cinema of struggle in the South and what it forgot or passed over in silence. Paying homage to Seyrig's feminism and her films would mean finally being willing to decolonize European feminism.

Anne Faisandier, Ioana Wieder, Claire Atherton, and Nadja Ringart, *Les racistes ne sont pas nos potes, les violeurs non plus* [The racists are not our friends, and the rapists aren’t either], 1986



RACISTS AREN’T OUR BUDDIES / NEITHER ARE RAPISTS / We don’t accept that our friends / should be humiliated, beaten or discriminated against / for not having the physical appearance / of a businessman, an owner of welfare housing, / or a policeman / towards women. / We can’t have the same attitude towards women as we deplore in everyone else. / But not a blond blue-eyed Frenchman, / nor a Caribbean, nor an Arab.


VIOL=CRIME
RAS LE
VIOL


LES RACISTES NE SONT PAS NOS POTES

LES VIOLEURS NON PLUS

Françoise Dasques, *La Conférence des femmes— Nairobi 85* [The Women's Conference—Nairobi 85], 1985

























Estella is one of the grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo / What do you think is the situation in Latin America? / The wages are terribly low / They are making these "enclaves" in our country within which the laws of the country don't apply / All the foreign exchange is taken away out of our country / To pay external debt reactionary governments kill / The massacre of Israel has continued for more than 20 years / I think this is playing the game of patriarchy / This is saying: my men are better than your men / We have death squads in South Africa / This is a feature of Zionism

Right to work, to education… / Type 2 of female circumcision


Droit au travail.
à l'éducation...


2ème type des mutilations
sexuelles féminines.


Je crois en effet qu'il faut
nous donner la main.


Le voile nous protège
des hommes













We should join hands across racism, across classes / Hijab protects us from any man

We have to recognize that women are oppressed as women / The specificity of our oppression must be recognized / Women have lost their right to divorce / As you know our penal law is barbaric / The policy has been to drive women back to their homes / Every single woman in Iran is wearing the veil

Carole Roussopoulos and the Association des femmes arabes immigrées en France (AFAIF)
***Des femmes immigrées de Gennevilliers* [Immigrant women of Gennevilliers], 1984**



















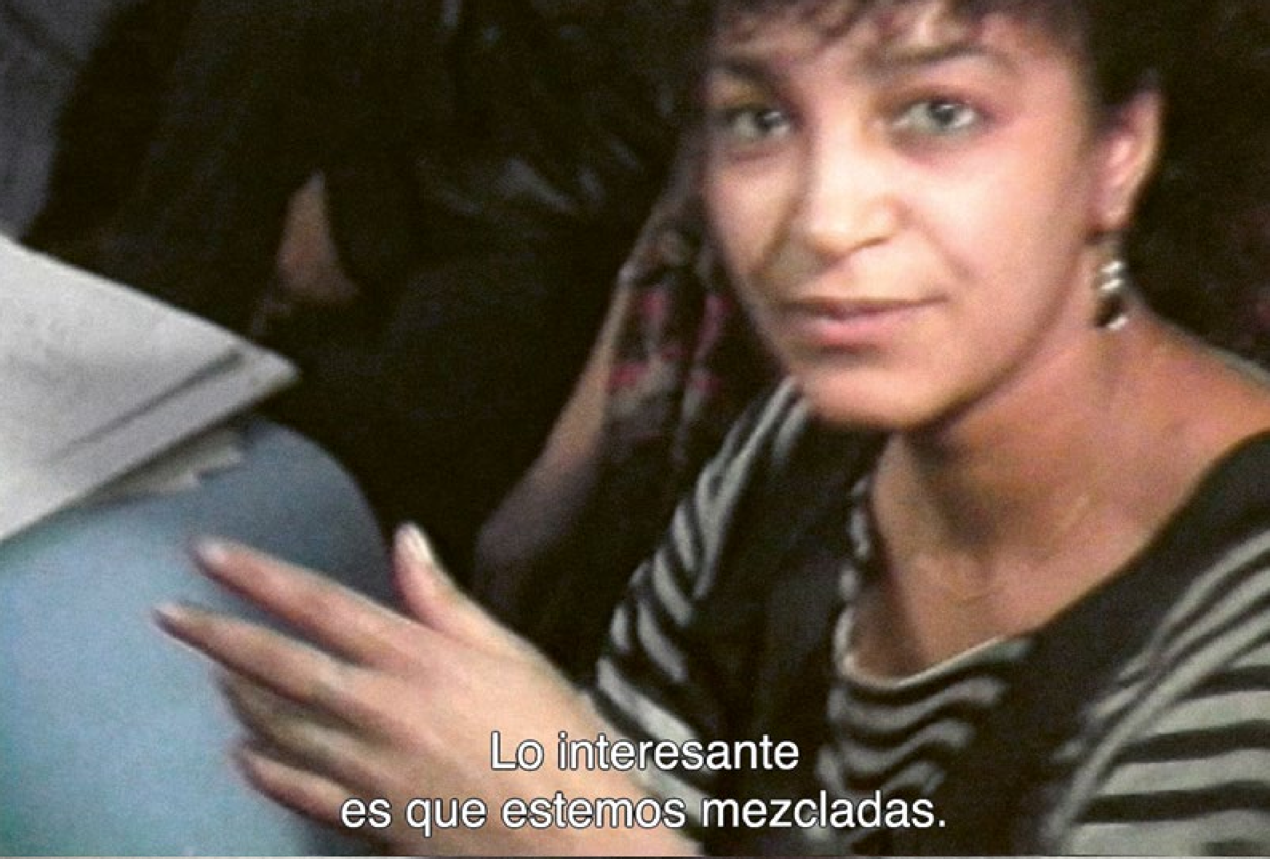






And when you come from a poor background and you end up in such a French context… / and I underwent a sort of very sudden mutation. / I questioned everything about my country. / Everything I'd lived through, the misery, my whole culture, / and eventually I made it disappear / I'm a classic immigrant. My parents came here / in 1968, when I was six, and put me into school / I'm what they call second generation / The interesting thing is we're all mixed up / The difficulties of the people who lived there and our own. / I felt lost there, but here I don't feel integrated. / Neither here nor in my own country.

The interesting thing is we're all mixed up. / I felt lost there, but here I don't feel integrated.


Lo interesante
es que estemos mezcladas.


Allí me sentía perdida,
pero aquí no me siento integrada.

“Never Seen but Fully Imagined”: Delphine Seyrig’s Part(s) in Ulrike Ottinger’s Cinema

Élisabeth Lebovici

Ulrike Ottinger. Stage photograph of *Freak Orlando* [Helena in the department store], 1981 (detail)



The first time we see her, it is as the goddess of the tree of life: *Lebensbaumgöttin* is the word used in the credits. Buried up to her waist in a murky substance with her arms spread out like branches and a Botticelli smile playing on her lips, she allows a hooded pilgrim to kiss one of her bare breasts. A few minutes later, as an announcer for the public address system of a department store having a sale on myths, with a strawberry around her neck and an electrified hairdo, she is fired by her superior, Zeus, who accuses her of dreaming instead of working. The first word she utters is *nein*, which in a sense removes the actress from her supposed passivity. But Delphine Seyrig is not dismissed from Ulrike Ottinger's film. On the contrary, she appears again and again, under various names and in various costumes, each more demented than the last, during the 126-minute course of the long, unquiet river that is *Freak Orlando* (1981).[1] Adorned with a corolla that frames her like a mandorla, she cradles a pair of conjoined twins in a postindustrial Berlin environment presented under the name "Freak City." Dressed entirely in red, she sits enthroned in a disused swimming pool like a water lily. She presides like the emanation of a revisited Republic of Saló over a dinner where the guests are naked, deprived of food, and forced to remain standing while the names of victims of the Terror are recited, from Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) to Else Lasker-Schüler (1869–1945). As the conjoined twin sister of Jackie Raynal, with whom she shares the same circus body, she flirts, dances,

1
In what follows, *Freak Orlando* is abbreviated as FO, *Dorian Gray im Spiegel der Boulevardpresse* (*Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press*) as DG, and *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* as Jo d'A.

and falls under the spell of Orlando-Orlanda.[2] One of the sisters is willing; the other is not. One has a child with Orlando-Orlanda and wants to live, while the other hates him, hates herself, drinks, and wants to die. Still in the company of Raynal but now in two separate bodies, Seyrig is also "Bunny Helena," a hostess in a rabbit costume like that of a Playboy Bunny and a supporting figure in a beauty contest designed to reward the ugliest person of the year.[3] And all this in FO alone! With this broad array of figures, Seyrig's visibility and narrativity do not—or do not only—reflect the register of the "lady" (Madame Tabard, or "Fabienne Tabard, Fabienne Tabard, Fabienne Tabard," as Antoine Doinel repeats in François Truffaut's *Baisers volés* [*Stolen Kisses*] of 1968) or that of the "grande dame" or "great lady" (the fantasy projection of *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* [*Last Year at Marienbad*, 1963] or *India Song* [1975]). Nor is she entirely contained in that mythical voice, the "Seyrig voice," that unique timbre constructed as quintessential by French theater and film, perhaps because Seyrig makes French sound like a foreign language, with her unpredictable way of punctuating her lines, which makes it easier to understand her.[4] In Ottinger's films, Seyrig speaks at least three languages "as a foreigner": German, English, and French. Right from the beginning, in Ottinger's films Seyrig eludes the transfer of authority that so-called classical cinema conferred upon a "male voice-over," which, according to the feminist theorist Kaja Silverman, is the secret enunciator of patriarchal

2
Before she was a director, Raynal was an editor as well as a program planner at the Bleecker Street and Carnegie Hall Cinemas in New York.

3
See Paul B. Preciado, *Pornotopie: Playboy et l'invention de la sexualité multimédia* (Paris: Climats, 2011).

4
Mireille Brangé, "Delphine Seyrig ou la voix sur le point de se perdre: Note sur les archives sonores des acteurs," *Théâtre/public*, no. 201 (2011): 127–31.

cinema.[5] This is the unobtrusive voice that "acts" or manipulates the fetishized sounds and bodies of women essentialized within the filmic diegesis in order to turn them into objects of spectacle. Seyrig is not within this voice. She is not a representation of power; she is its mnemonic figure.[6] If only because, as one critic observes,

> From André Gide and Victor Segalen to Alain Robbe-Grillet and Marguerite Duras, the French experimental tradition, to give only one instance, is situated again and again on the cultural terrains of Africa and Asia. Ottinger's repeated casting of Delphine Seyrig (particularly as Frau Dr. Mabuse and then as Lady Windermere) works to evoke this tradition as well as the parallel tradition of narrative experimentation of the French New Wave. In the wake of her famous starring roles in Alain Resnais's *Muriel* (1961) and *Last Year at Marienbad* (1963), Marguerite Duras's *India Song* (1975), and Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), Seyrig's very voice and face have come to stand, in some ways, for the interlocking problematics of time, memory, and exoticism.[7]

Thus, rather than iconic, her presence is *iconographic.*

Next to Seyrig, Magdalena Montezuma, who accompanies her twice, in FO and DG, and Irm Hermann, who appears in DG, *Superbia—Der Stolz* (*Superbia: Pride*, 1986), and *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* (1989), impress one as icons of German cinema of the second half of the twentieth century. Montezuma was Werner Schroeter's favorite actress and can also be seen in the films of Rosa von Praunheim. Until she moved to Berlin, Hermann was almost exclusively associated with the Munich-based

5
Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 39ff.

6
The media theorist Lawrence Rickels proposes the hypothesis of the "allegorical figure." Speaking of Seyrig in DG in the role of Frau Mabuse, he explains that she "is not a representation or representative of tyranny, she is 'a memory of tyranny,' an allegorical figure." Lawrence A. Rickels, *Ulrike Ottinger: The Autobiography of Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 94.

7
Katie Trumpener, "*Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* in the Mirror of *Dorian Gray*: Ethnographic Recordings and the Aesthetics of the Market in the Recent Films of Ulrike Ottinger," *New German Critique* 60 (Fall 1993): 89n10.

scene of Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Although Seyrig was quite interested in that scene and in dissident political activity in Germany, it was not the milieu from which she came. From the beginning, she transcends everything that might indicate Ottinger's "German" position—and restrict Ottinger to that identification. No. Seyrig brings with her at once her own filmography but also bits of history, scraps of cinema, and remnants of paintings, including those by Ottinger: fragments of cultural history that are frequently expressed in the meticulous design of costumes that go far beyond any conceivable notion of comfort, as well as in the choice of locations and sets. "Art has many Siamese twins."[8] Thus, it is easy to find doubles for some of the descriptions sketched at the beginning of this essay. Before she was a bust and the tree of life, Seyrig was buried up to her neck in an urn by Samuel Beckett (Marin Karmitz and Beckett, *Comédie*, 1966). The electrified hairstyle shared by Seyrig and Helena Mueller in FO is a replica of that of Elsa Lanchester in the horror film *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). The character of Frau Mabuse in DG is a variation on the costume of singer Klaus Nomi, which itself was inspired by that of Hugo Ball, which also inspired David Bowie, and it contains echoes of the black-and-white modernism of Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Inhumaine* (*The Inhuman Woman*, 1924), the first film to thematize television. As an emanation of Marlene Dietrich and a passenger on Trans-Siberian and later Trans-Mongolian trains that explicitly cite *Shanghai Express* (1932), the "Wildean" Lady

8
This is how Ottinger answers the question, "Godard once said that technique is the daughter of art. Would you agree with this definition, which ascribes a gender to technique?" Patricia Wiedenhöft, "Interview with Ulrike Ottinger," 1990, Ulrike Ottinger [website], https://www.ulrikeottinger.com/index.php/746/articles/interview-with-ulrike-ottinger-by-patricia-wiedenhoeft.html (accessed July 10, 2019); translation modified.

Windermere of Jo d'A is transformed in the blink of an eye—that is, in a change of setting, poof!, from studio to steppe—into an ethnologist in the mold of Margaret Mead or an amateur explorer like Ella Maillart (a friend of Seyrig's mother, Hermine de Saussure). In DG once again, Frau Mabuse and Golem, the name of one of her female assistants—the others being Passat (a semiautomatic keyword research program) and Susy (an information retrieval system used on computers)—refer, among other things, to the history of German cinema as well as that of media technologies.[9] But this "simple" doubling does not come close to accounting for the infinite echoes in every scene, with their multitude of details informed by a "meticulous erudition."[10] Rather than a simple mirror, Ottinger's films require something like a "disco ball," with its countless facets. Every character that Seyrig portrays in these films *performs* diverse roles, each one of which gives rise to various ramifications, which in their turn become "pure performance[s]."[11] Combined, these principles of accumulation, contamination, and citation seem literally to guide the set changes that occur in full view of the audience in each film. Thus, any admiration shown toward the actress, who is not just sublime but a magnificent actress, also wears a more twisted, sardonic, and distorting mask: that of parody and citation. As Jean-Marc Lalanne remarks, "a great actress already doubled by her own drag impersonator—that may be the most contemporary, as well as the most political, dimension of Delphine

9
Rickels, *Ulrike Ottinger*. In his book, Rickels seeks to show how references proliferate and contaminate one another in Ottinger's films.

10
Ibid., 81.

11
"At this point, Jo d'A undergoes a transition from the train into the plains of Mongolia. The ostentatiously artificial—or 'campy'—cinematography of the train gives way to what appears as an ethnographic gaze and documentary. The plains may be less obviously decadent, but . . . *they are pure performance*." Cyrus Shahan, "Decadent Fetishism in Ulrike Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*," *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 45, no. 2 (2009): 174–188; emphasis added.

Seyrig's art."[12] This observation situates each of Seyrig's performances squarely within the postmodern thought of the 1980s and 1990s—the very thought that, in 1977, enabled Douglas Crimp to wrest the materiality of the photographic image from the "truthfulness" or authenticity of the medium. Crimp's *Pictures*, an exhibition as well as an essay, focuses on images as tools for appropriating, quoting, staging, and stratifying other, preexisting images, including many already reproduced by the mass media.[13] For his part, Craig Owens, an art historian, as well as a friend and colleague of Crimp, identifies an "allegorical impulse." By identifying various strategies such as "appropriation, site specificity, impermanence, accumulation, discursivity, [and] hybridization" for eliminating the traditional canons of the unique artwork, authenticity, and the artist as creator—categories that are all gendered male—Crimp also paved the way for a strategic feminism determined to reveal the mechanisms of seduction and suggestion implicit in those principles.[14] Thus, the critical function of contemporary art takes the form of accumulation, repetition, and contamination. Or, as Felix Gonzalez-Torres once said, "If I function as a virus, an imposter, an infiltrator, I will always replicate myself together with those institutions."[15]

I wish to discuss Seyrig and the 1980s under the sign of *Pictures*. To consider this relationship, which is also a decade, is also to evoke Seyrig in Ottinger's films. The collaboration opens with FO, a title that evokes a cross between Virginia Woolf's novel and Tod Browning's film—Sapphic

12
Jean-Marc Lalanne, "Delphine Seyrig" (text of presentation at Rétrospectives: Delphine Seyrig, La Rochelle, France, July 2007), Archives du Festival International du Film de La Rochelle, http://archives.festival-larochelle.org/taxonomy/term/330 (accessed August 22, 2018).

13
Pictures, exhibition at Artists Space, New York, 1977; and Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 75–88.

14
Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism: Part 1," *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 67–86; and Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism: Part 2," *October* 13 (Summer 1980): 58–80. For Owens, these strategies construct "much of the art of the present and distinguish it from its modernist predecessors" (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Part 1," 75).

15
"Joseph Kosuth and Felix Gonzalez-Torres: A Conversation," in *Symptoms of Interference, Conditions of Possibility*, exh. cat. (London: Camden Arts Center, 1994); available online at http://www.andrearosengallery.com/exhibitions/felix-gonzalez-torres-and-joseph-kosuth (accessed July 11, 2019).

modernity incorporated into an entertainment venue where the freaks, so to speak, have the "keys to the city," a literal "Freak City" constructed in West Berlin. The film exhibits a transition—permanent, like all transitions—in this case, that of Orlando-Orlanda.[16] As a wanderer through time, (s)he strolls through the episodes of an epic that, thanks to the repetition of its figures and landscapes, is more cyclical than linear. FO is followed by the third film of Ottinger's Berlin trilogy, *Dorian Gray im Spiegel der Boulevardpresse*.[17] "Frau Dr. Mabuse, boss of an international media empire, has devised an unscrupulous plan for further expansion: 'Our organization will create a human being whom we can shape and manipulate according to our needs. Dorian Gray: young, rich and handsome. We will make him, seduce him and break him.'"[18] "Operation Mirror" is doubled by a colonial opera that recounts the conquest of the Canary Islands, in which Dorian Gray appears as Don Luis de la Cerda, Infant of Spain, whom Frau Dr. Mabuse, as the Grand Inquisitor, forces to exploit the island's abundant natural resources, thus imposing the dynamic of colonialism. In the short film *Superbia—Der Stolz*, Seyrig, encased in an avant-garde harlequin costume and perched on a crowded tank covered with newspaper, parades past with a ring-shaped helmet on her head. Reaching into a large bag, she throws black-and-white printed dollars at a character with a green face and bright blue military uniform standing next to her. At the "Pride" parade, the

16
I borrow the expression "Sapphic modernity" from the title of a book whose subject is not Virginia Woolf: Jasmine Rault, *Eileen Gray and the Design of Sapphic Modernity: Staying In* (London: Routledge, 2016).

17
Ticket of No Return (1979), FO, and DG constitute a trilogy, "where Berlin's ready-made status as most ancient or primal city of our more recent past and most traumatic history becomes visible, through the artist's work of metamorphosis, as a narrative of episodes cutting through time and space." Rickels, *Ulrike Ottinger*, 88.

18
"Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press" (excerpt from the screenplay), Ulrike Ottinger [website], https://www.ulrikeottinger.com/index.php/dorian-gray-in-the-mirror-of-the-yellow-press.html (accessed July 10, 2019); translation modified.

circus-like, danse macabre, and cubist-costumed participants (singing "Grüss Gott") are combined with archival footage of military parades of every nation. Through it all, we catch glimpses of a painted background showing riot squads equipped for street battle. Finally, there is *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*. This 1989 film, whose title is a clash of three languages, concludes Seyrig and Ottinger's trilogy of feature films. It deals with subject matter "From the East," but in this case from the Far East, where Lady Windermere goes with several singing and dancing women (the train bears some resemblance to a variety theater) and where they come in contact with Mongolia, its territory, and its matriarchy of female horse riders and hunters led by a creature as imperious as she is real, Princess Ida.[19] Leaving behind "Frau Dr. Mabuse's hall of mirrors, the viewer enters, with relief, the wide-eyed world of Lady Windermere, moving from a vision of the media as all powerful and imprisoning to a vision of the media as informative and empowering."[20] Fiction merges with documentary, exotic film with ethnographic recording. Here, fascination—with the other, with the foreigner—is met with an equal and opposite fascination on the part of that other, that foreigner, so that the conjunction of the two creates an "alternative" space, neither here nor elsewhere, in which it is possible to live together. This was also Seyrig's last film before her death in 1990. I cannot help but think that this final decade is a time and space in which Seyrig engages—or is engaged by—a set of creative ideas concerning

19 "From the East" is the English-language title of Akerman's film and installation *D'Est* (1993).

20 Trumpener, "*Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*," 89.

the recycling of visual tropes and clichés that have always been used by popular cultures—including cinema—and that her own image and voice invite one to engage in. The point, in a sense, is to play with "Delphine Seyrig," to initiate a (modified) mirror stage in which the issue of identification returns, diffracted by the queer theory then beginning to emerge.

But before we venture onto this terrain, it is worth recalling the context. Since the 1970s, Seyrig had primarily worked with women directors, especially in cinema. She worked with Duras and Akerman; with Liliane de Kermadec, Patricia Moraz, and Maria Metzaros; and with Ottinger, the latter functioning as both cinematographer and director of her own films.[21] This dual role in the cinematic factory production process struck Seyrig as "extraordinary." As she explained in one of her interviews, "It's very unusual. I have never worked before with a director who also operates the camera." She continued, "The shoots with Ulrike are always very difficult, never comfortable, since she's working to achieve something very complicated: she succeeds in bringing nature and artificiality together into one perspective."[22] The arrangement was extraordinary for weaving together the assumption of all roles by a single person (in addition to director and cinematographer, Ottinger was also the screenwriter and editor of her films) with the project of the film itself. Such an imbrication of the film's technical operations and its narrative viewpoint is a phenomenon worth lingering over.

21
With Duras (in addition to *La Musica*, 1965): *India Song* (1975), *Son Nom de Venise dans Calcutta Désert* (1976), *Baxter, Vera Baxter* (1977); with Akerman: *Jeanne Dielman 23 quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) (and later *Golden Eighties* and *Letters Home*, both 1986). Akerman and Ottinger also took part in the same commission, *Sieben Frauen—Sieben Todsünden* (*Seven Women—Seven Sins*, 1987), which brought together the work of seven directors.

22
Gerhard Midding, "Das kritische Alter, mein Lieber! Ein Gespräch mit der französischen Schauspielerin Delphine Seyrig," *Taz*, April 13, 1989, 14, quoted in Rickels, *Ulrike Ottinger*, 127 [in slightly different translations from those used here—Trans.]. The interview continues, "The film strikes me as a result of fantasy and of love for a place one has never been. . . . It seems to me that as a child, Ulrike was enthusiastic about

Mongolia and that it became a magical place for her. . . . When you see Johanna d'Arc in this childlike mood, it's impossible to claim that you don't understand it. That would be like saying, 'I don't understand Snow White, or I don't understand Cinderella.' This is Ulrike's fairy tale, a memory of her fantasies as a child, a reminiscence of something that she's never seen but has certainly fully imagined. . . . Hence the mixture of her fantasy and reality are omnipresent in the film."

Seyrig's work with women directors also continued in other ways, since the 1980s—1982 to be precise—were also when, together with Carole Roussopoulos and Ioana Wieder, she founded the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir, which was designed to collect, conserve, and bring attention to the work of women filmmakers. Deeply involved in the women's movement after 1970, Seyrig was thus herself "conjoined" to these women: as actor, director, codirector, collector, and archivist. In films directed by others—films in which she "plays" the actress—she became like all women artists who were models; that is, varied *exhibitions* in the artists' eyes. Consider, for example, Victorine Meurent, who was repeatedly employed as a model by Édouard Manet.[23] For Meurent, Suzanne Valadon, and so many others, becoming a painted figure did not mean simply negotiating a fee for practicing a profession, "posing," which, contrary to what the word implies, involves going along with an endless series of transformations, disguises, and repetitions. Sometimes it is a job; sometimes more. In Olympia's gaze as she stares at the viewer (Manet, *Olympia*, 1863) or in Manet's only portrait of Meurent (*Victorine Meurent*, ca. 1862), there is the spectacle of a face that refuses to make a spectacle of itself, declines to let the slightest emotion penetrate the materiality of its surface. "No direct access to the self," Silverman writes.[24] Is it the fact that she is in drag (*Mlle V… en costume d'Espada* [*Mademoiselle V… in the Costume of an Espada*], 1862) that leads the critic, who is

23
See Carol M. Armstrong, *Manet Manette* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

24
She writes this in reference to *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* (*Ticket of No Return*), the first film of Ottinger's Berlin trilogy. Quoted in Alice A. Kuzniar, *The Queer German Cinema* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 150.

probably also bothered by the model's frontal gaze, to complain that "beneath these brilliant costumes, the person herself is a bit lacking"?[25] There may be someone in this exchange of gazes who knows more than he does. As a painter herself, Victorine knows the score. She knows that a painted surface is above all the result of a production process whose materiality she can follow from the makeup on her skin to the final touches of paint. Seyrig is not taken in either. In a striking parallel, her face is also experienced as an enigma. The American critic B. Ruby Rich detects in her a peculiar manner of constantly severing "the connection between signifier and signified. Her performances challenge the viewer to join her in transcending the filmic text to reveal the purity of the sign and the power of the moment."[26]

Thus, in the 1970s and 1980s, this active collaboration between actress and filmmaker primarily involved women. This reciprocity was demanded in equal measure by Ottinger, for whom the development of every character had to be a shared endeavor. Perhaps we should henceforth use the trans* pronoun *they* to refer to these figures of cinema whose production destabilizes the transitive relationship between "role" and "character," "character" and "figure," "figure" and "actress," and so on. From her archives and conversations with those close to her, we learn how deeply involved Seyrig was in the creation of her roles—not just of her character but her lines. In her biography, for example, we read that she rewrote the French translations of Harold Pinter

25
Théophile Thoré-Bürger, "Salon de 1863," in *Salons de William Bürger 1861 à 1868* (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1870), 1:424–25, quoted in Armstrong, *Manet Manette*, 149.

26
R. Ruby Rich, "Delphine Seyrig: Variations on an Enigma: The Billy Rose Tribute to Delphine Seyrig," monograph for the Museum of Modern Art (2002), n.p.

and Luigi Pirandello for the theater.[27] Seyrig is an exemplary figure for formulating a "politics of actors" that would resemble the "politics of *auteurs*," the critical upheaval introduced by François Truffaut in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1955.[28]

For a filmmaker—and no doubt more broadly for women who ask (themselves) questions!—the focus of the shared inquiry is never, "What does it mean to be a woman?" This is a meaningless question; it can be asked only by a man, who is sure of his universality. On the contrary, all feminist reflection has a de-essentializing tendency—beginning with the opening sentence of volume 2 of *The Second Sex* ("one isn't born a woman but rather becomes one").[29] How did this term *woman* then come into existence? It is the historical product of a patriarchal, Western, white rhetoric that turned to the dichotomy "woman/man" to construct itself. In the same way, a system of knowledge has organized itself around the opposition "heterosexuality/homosexuality," and in the late 1980s the heterosexual matrix that produced that system was denounced by the queer reflection then beginning to emerge (with Gayle Rubin, Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and others). All of this reflection drew support from figures, whether literary, photographic, or cinematographic, that were borrowed from various cultural forms, with Ottinger's cinema having a strategic place among them. For example, taking Mulvey's deconstruction of Hollywood narrative cinema at its "ideal" (i.e.,

27
See Brangé, "Delphine Seyrig."

28
François Truffaut, "Ali Baba et la 'Politique des Auteurs,'" *Cahiers du Cinéma* 44 (February 1955): 45–47.

29
Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage, 2011), 283; translation modified.

most normative) moment, we know that the male characters carry the action, while the female ones freeze it. The appearance of the female characters is constructed in such a way as to connote "to-be-looked-at-ness," and their exhibition both recalls and wards off the castration anxiety that their status as fetishized objects helps to deny. This is the heterosexual division of labor with respect to the active/passive binary, building the narrative structure required for a "universal"—that is, male—visual pleasure. While it participates in a narrative project as well, Ottinger's cinema also takes part in the debate "Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women's Cinema."[30] It is read "as camp, as narcissism, as marginal lesbianism."[31] But I really like what Seyrig says in a German interview where she links her work with the director-cinematographer to the latter's work itself, which she describes as embodying "fantasy and . . . love for a place one has never been . . ., a reminiscence of something that she's never seen but has certainly fully imagined."[32] This reads like an echo of Monique Wittig's injunction, "You say there are no words to describe this time, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent."[33] As if directly taking up this invitation, the narrative system dreamed/filmed by Ottinger dismantles the "impression of reality" of patriarchal Hollywood cinema. It offers a "ticket of no return" (to quote the English title of Ottinger's 1979 film) to the temporal and spatial laws of a well-defined genre, trampling and fragmenting its linearity into a series of

30
This is the title of an article by Teresa de Lauretis in *New German Critique* 34 (Winter 1985): 154–75. For more on the relationship between Ottinger's films and Mulvey's essay "Sur le rapport avec le texte de Mulvey," see Kaja Silverman, "From the Ideal Ego to the Active Gift of Love," in *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

31
Amy Villarejo, "Archiving the Diaspora: A Lesbian Impression of/in Ulrike Ottinger's *Exile Shanghai*," *New German Critique* 87 (Autumn 2002): 159.

32
Midding, "Das kritische Alter," 14.

33
Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, trans. David Le Vay (London: The Women's Press, 1979), 89.

explicit or implicit episodes that do not necessarily represent chronological "progress" and introducing a spatial indeterminacy between landscape and set, as well as their mutual *disidentifications.*

Is it not the prerogative of flânerie—and hence of the flaneuse or wanderer—to be an actor in the public space and at the same time its narrator and interpreter or performer? Thus, in many of the roles in which Seyrig traverses Ottinger's films, she is the figure who shows herself while also showing, demonstrating, indicating, translating, guiding, and transforming things into images. She is a kind of linchpin at the intersection of direction and image, as if it were she who made it possible to translate a text into a visual technology, or even into a visual fetishism exhibiting her.[34] This conjunction can be seen in Jo d'A, as Katarina Sykora explains:

> Delphine Seyrig, who—in the guise of Lady Windermere, Virgil and an ethnologist—guides us through Ulrike Ottinger's film *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*, is the star witness for this visual technique. In a saloon car of the Transsiberian Railway, she speaks the polyglot prologue to the coming adventure, accompanied by a 360° pan across the opulent wall surface of the artificial, mobile shell in which she travels. At the end, the camera completes the circle and returns to her. But suddenly, in an infinitesimal moment of stasis—which we might call the moment when photography arrests the cinematic image—we see a rift in the trompe-l'œil backdrop. Brought to the surface, this is the rift in the medium of film that also stands for the gap between photographic images.[35]

The 1980s critique of the system of domination, paired with a reinvestment in visual pleasure

34
See Pamela Robertson, *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 150–52.

35
Katharina Sykora, "Ulrike Ottinger—Sessions," trans. David Britt, Ulrike Ottinger [website] https://www.ulrikeottinger.com/index.php/photographs/articles/text-sykora.html (accessed July 11, 2019).

and sexuality, both of which are palpable in the aesthetic realized by Ottinger, can also be read in the transatlantic debates. In the United States, the debate surrounding issues of representation and images, concerning what can be seen and what cannot be tolerated, was raging and causing a sensation among feminists.[36] A running battle was underway between pro- and anti-pornography forces in the Unites States and Europe. The question of visual pleasure was not tangential to these debates. How are we to anticipate a world of alternative images that have yet to be produced if not by drawing on the common stock of images and reconsidering the question of their appeal? How then, as a feminist, is one to explore the phantasmatic potential of these existing images, which were produced and put into circulation by the patriarchal society?[37]

Ottinger pursues just such an exploration in her labor of accumulation and collage, two impulses that were already at work in her paintings (1962–1968).[38] Her short film *Superbia* begins and ends with the first and last panels, respectively, of her triptych *Dieu de Guerre* (God of War, 1967–1968, on display at the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau München), which unites the form of the altar painting, with its central scene and two side panels, with a style of representation borrowed from pinball machines—thus combining *Dieu* (God) with *Jeu* (play)—to paint images collected from the media on the subject of war in Vietnam or social tensions in France. Painting thus serves as the stage

36
See especially, Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” (1978), in *Sister Outsider* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 53–59; and “Sex Issue,” special issue, *Heresies* 12 (1981). See also *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carol Vance (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

37
See Elisabeth Lebovici, *Ce que le sida m’a fait: Art et activisme à la fin du 20e siècle*, Lectures Maison Rouge (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2017), esp. ch. 5.

38
Rickels prefers to speak of an impulse or passion for “collection.” Rickels, *Ulrike Ottinger*, 72.

curtain for a film, and vice versa. “In numerous photographic sessions, she develops images and narrative ideas that subsequently emerge, in modified form, in her films. In her film scenarios, all this comes together. Newspaper photographs and kitsch postcards, the fictional narrative text and the recording and shaping process that takes place in the artist’s own photography: all these here become a single palimpsest that takes shape on the page but also in the head.”[39] At issue, too, is fantasy and its relationship with a visual pleasure that, as de Lauretis writes, exceeds “the conceptual frame . . ., which makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to articulate the differences of women from Woman, that is . . . the differences within women.”[40]

39
Sykora, “Ulrike Ottinger.”

40
Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 2; emphasis removed.

Because it represents a release from heterosexist time and space, entering a site freed from misogynist myths also means abandoning the binary division of genders and sexualities. Take the example of Dorian Gray. In Ottinger’s film, the title role, which is gendered male in Oscar Wilde’s novel, is played by Veruschka von Lehndorff, the leading supermodel of the 1960s. However, this is never mentioned except in the credits. Is this a woman in the role of a queer boy? Is it a transgender person? Or a butch lesbian? A butch lesbian who has chosen Dorian, a man’s name, as her first name? It is impossible to choose any one of these options and stick to it. Today, for example, we would most readily opt for the trans* hypothesis, which according to J. Jack Halberstam establishes the obsolescence of the male/female

binary system.[41] As Mary Russo points out with respect to the character of Orlando, played by Montezuma, the latter's "performance within the film adds an important trajectory in that she plays a woman playing a man *to another woman*."[42] As Woolf herself writes in reference to Orlando, "Though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved." According to Amy Villarejo, Jo d'A makes explicit this bridge "between . . . two domains—lesbian sexuality and Asia."[43]

Indeed. Under the term *lesbian*, Wittig produced a figure capable of rethinking visual pleasure beyond the heterosexual institution. For if, as she writes, "lesbians are not women" and are thus liberated from a gender captured by a heterocentric society, "the lesbian" is neither simply an individual with a sexual preference nor a simple social subject with a political priority but a conceptual figure, the subject of a cognitive practice.[44] In narrative cinema, she thus opens up a relational space, where "Ottinger places the spectator in the complicated position of receiver and bearer of a desiring gaze. Lesbianism informs Ottinger's films not primarily or predominantly as a diegetic element but as one centrally concerned with 'eroticizing the thresholds between women.'"[45] Seyrig is endowed with the full potential of this eroticization, "as the film *Les lèvres rouges* had already shown. As a queer icon, with her hyperbolic femininity she enabled a critical deconstruction of the figure of the woman in cinema."[46] She makes it possible to imagine, "beyond the pleasure principle" as defined in the

41
J. Jack Halberstam, *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 29.

42
Mary Russo, "Freaks, Freak Orlando, Orlando," in *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 104.

43
Villarejo, "Archiving the Diaspora," 160.

44
Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind," in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 32.

45
Brenda Longfellow, "Lesbian Phantasy and the Other Woman in Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*," *Screen* 34, no. 2 (July 1, 1993): 134.

46
Brangé, "Delphine Seyrig." *Les Lèvres rouges* was released in English as *Daughters of Darkness*.

heterosexual contract, a nonbinary femaleness and the relationship of seduction it produces.

"How do I look?" de Lauretis asks.[47] The question is ambiguous, and that is precisely what makes it so interesting; it suggests that looking is also being seen. Or, rather, that producing a gaze also means being produced by historical modalities, institutional constraints, and technological possibilities. It means becoming simultaneously a subject of perception and an object made visible within the perception of others ("How am I seen?"). It makes clear that the visual process is constructed as an integral (or integrated) part of the shared scenario of a fantasy of which every participant is subject as well as object—she who looks while also being visible and is therefore "seen seeing." This process, this relationship, is displayed by Seyrig in her own name.

47
Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 85.


FREAK ORLANDO
ein Film von
Ulrike Ottinger



Ulrike Ottinger. Poster of *Freak Orlando*, 1981

Ulrike Ottinger. Stage photograph of *Freak Orlando* [Helena in the department store], 1981 (detail)

pp.184–185: **Ulrike Ottinger.** Stage photograph of *Freak Orlando* [Feast of persecuted scientists and artists], 1981











Ulrike Ottinger. Stage photograph of *Freak Orlando* [The Siamese twins Lena-Leni], 1981

Ulrike Ottinger. Stage photograph of *Dorian Gray im Spiegel der Boulevardpresse* [Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press. Press Ball], 1983

Ulrike Ottinger. Stage photograph of *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* [Encounter in the grasslands], 1988



Noreen Flynn. Stage photograph
of *Superbia—The Pride*, 1986



pp. 190–191:
Ulrike Ottinger. Stage photograph of *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* [Lady Windermere's parlour], 1988





“A Remarkable Story”: The Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir in Paris

Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez and Giovanna Zapperi in Conversation with Nicole Fernández Ferrer

Catherine Deudon. Dany, Nicole Fernández Ferrer, Annie Kensey, Carole Roussopoulos, Delphine Seyrig, and Danielle Mitterrand, 1984 (detail)



Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez and Giovanna Zapperi: How did the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir come into existence?

Nicole Fernández Ferrer: The center's statutes were registered in January 1982 by two organizations, Les Muses s'amusent (made up of Delphine Seyrig, Carole Roussopoulos, and Ioana Wieder) and Les Griffonnes, which consisted of documentalists and archivists. The Left was in power in 1982, so it was the right time to ask the government for help so they could collect everything they'd filmed. In the late 1960s, feminists had discovered the Portapak, a lightweight video camera that enabled them to film women's struggles and strikes. The organization Les Muses s'amusent, which was dedicated to activist video, was founded in 1974. It was thanks to the initiative of Delphine Seyrig, an actress, human rights activist, and video maker; Carole Roussopoulos, the first woman to use a Portapak; and Ioana Wieder, a translator and very close friend of Delphine that the center opened its doors in Paris in June 1982 at 32 rue Maurice Ripoche, a little side street off the Avenue du Maine. Photographs by Martine Franck show the three founders in the three-story house. There were activities on every floor: editing in the basement, public access and screenings on the ground floor, offices on the second, and another cutting room on the third. Les Griffonnes left the project just a few days before the opening, and the center was opened by Les Muses s'amusent alone. So I was hired to compensate for the lack of archivists and documentalists.

NPB and GZ: To create a center concerned with the future of these archives and technical supports was groundbreaking.

NFF: It was certainly groundbreaking to think about conserving these videotapes and transferring them to new supports so that nothing would be lost. The center's founders were interested in archiving as well as in continuing to produce; the two were closely linked.

NPB and GZ: The center is named after Simone de Beauvoir. How was she contacted, and how did she react to the request to use her name?

NFF: Delphine approached Simone de Beauvoir with that request, and she said yes right away. She came to the center often and always offered her support, including with fundraising. She continued to attend the screenings and discussions right up to her death in 1986.

NPB and GZ: What had been your background in the feminist movement before you encountered the center and its founders?

NFF: I met the center's founders before it was created. At that time, I was involved in feminist organizations in Normandy, where I lived, as well as with the GLH, a gay and lesbian activist group. I was going to demonstrations in Paris and elsewhere. Then one day in 1975 I saw Carole and Delphine filming at the French-Spanish border, at the great march where French women joined Spanish women to protest the assassination of Basque activists. Shortly afterward, I took a video workshop with Carole in Paris and got involved with

a feminist group that was organizing screenings of feminist films in Rouen, the city where I lived. Carole was offering video workshops to teach other women how to use a camera. I recently happened upon a few seconds of rushes from that workshop, an intervention regarding a text by Henry Miller. In 1982, Carole sent me an invitation to the Center's opening. That's how I reconnected with her. I was hired almost immediately.

NPB and GZ: Under what conditions?

NFF: It's a bit of a remarkable story. At the center's opening, Carole introduced me to Delphine, whom I had already seen, and then to Ioana, and asked me what I was currently doing. I answered, "I've just finished my studies in archives, audiovisual documentation, and the computerization of databases." At the time, computerized databases were really just beginning to arrive on the scene. Then she responded that she had something to propose to me. I thought it might be a casual job. She went to get Delphine, and I realized it was something more important. Then they told me they were looking for someone to be in charge of the archives and documentation. A few days later, I was hired. It was my first steady job, and above all it was what I'd been dreaming of; that is, film, archives, and feminism.

NPB and GZ: What were your initial impressions of Carole Roussopoulos and Delphine Seyrig? What was it like to work with them?

NFF: They both had strong personalities. I had seen Delphine on stage and in films. I really liked what

she was doing, and I was quite awed to be working with her. It was as if she had stepped right off the screen. From Carole I learned video editing. Carole was in charge of production. Delphine spent her time outside the center representing and supporting it, raising money, persuading people to come, et cetera. As for Iona, she was also quite active and in charge of administering the project.

NPB and GZ: Had you participated in video collectives in the 1970s?

NFF: I was involved in feminist struggles. I had taken the video workshop with my group in Rouen, which also included Joëlle Bolloch, a member of the center's current board. After that, I continued to work with Carole as a sound engineer from 1984 to 1987.

NPB and GZ: Why was it politically important to film women's demonstrations and strikes? Was there a conscious awareness of the need to share, to leave traces?

NFF: Yes, to preserve traces and to make the struggles more widely known. The videos circulated in France as well as in Europe. They were shared by women who participated in the actions, who didn't film the activists like insects in a jar but as companions in the struggle. We had screened videos by Carole and Delphine in Rouen. As a lesbian feminist activist, I was aware of the existence of the Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire.[1] When I saw the video *Le FHAR*, I didn't make the connection with Carole. I thought, "It's great that Greeks came to France to film the

1
Le FHAR, or Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (Homosexual Revolutionary Action Front), is a radical gay and lesbian movement founded in Paris in 1971.

gay and lesbian movement. Why didn't the French do it?" In fact, both Carole and her husband Paul were already living in France. I was also familiar with the work of two other video collectives, Vidéa and Vidéo 00. It was easy to stay informed, since there had been articles in the feminist press. In 1978, I had attended a video program at the Action République movie theater in Paris called "Une Bande de femmes présente des bandes de femmes" [A Group of Women Presents Videos by Women].

NPB and GZ: What was the overall landscape of activist video like when the center was formed? What had changed since 1975–1976?

NFF: In terms of technology, the film and equipment were more advanced; it was the early days of color. In terms of distribution, the center took over a portion of the distribution that had previously been overseen by the distributor Mon œil. In terms of politics, the feminist movement was entering a phase of institutionalization. The Ministry of Culture, the CNC [Centre National du Cinéma], and the Ministry of Women's Rights, which was led by Yvette Roudy at the time, provided us with the funds to do our filming and archiving. That altered the activists' relationship with the state. The films reflect that change, since they often deal with the new laws regarding women's rights. They also dealt with things that hadn't changed, like sexual violence. From the point of view of government support for women's initiatives, the situation in France at the time was different from that which

existed, for example, in the United States or the United Kingdom, where the Right was in power.

NPB and GZ: Mitterrand was elected in 1981. The Left was in power. In the French political landscape, new subjects were making themselves heard in new ways. One thinks of the big anti-racism demonstrations and LGBT movements like Act Up Paris. A reconfiguration of the struggles was taking place, and it wasn't just a matter of the movement resting on its successes; a new openness was fueled by those subjects. How did the center navigate that decade's struggles? For example, was there a reorientation toward greater inclusiveness, particularly with regard to the issues raised by racialized [*racisées*] women, women from a migrant background, and lesbians? How did the center participate in what was happening then?

NFF: The term *racialized* wasn't used at the time. People spoke of women of immigrant origin, from the former colonies, or from the overseas departments and territories, which was actually quite confusing. The center made a film about the experience of SOS Racisme. With regard to lesbians, the most interesting production in my view took place before the 1980s: *Le FHAR* by Carole dates from 1971, before the creation of the center, as does the video *Manifestation contre la répression de l'homosexualité* [Demonstration against the repression of homosexuality], which was produced by Vidéa (1977). As for AIDS, it began to be talked about in France in 1984; the center didn't produce anything specifically on the topic.

NPB and GZ: You and Carole left the center. Why?

NFF: It was late 1984 and early 1985, two years after I had begun to collaborate with the center. The board of directors was mainly composed of academics, and the conflict bore primarily on issues of production. The team of seven or eight people was quite cumbersome to manage. I chose to leave with Carole because I felt it was important to continue to make films and I got along well with her. Unfortunately, Delphine died prematurely in 1990. The center had several directors until its closure in 1993. After Delphine's death, it became more and more difficult to raise money for the center. That period was quite chaotic, but I can only discuss it as an outside observer.

NPB and GZ: What was the public life of the center like in the 1980s?

NFF: In 1983, Ioana Wieder launched regular screenings, "Les Bonnes soirées," and the ground floor hall at 32 rue Maurice Ripoche was always full. Simone de Beauvoir was often there, and we had discussions after the screenings. The audience was made up primarily of feminists. The Internet didn't exist at the time, but a group of feminists that called itself Les Répondeuses [The Responders] set up a telephone answering machine for everything connected with feminism in France and elsewhere. Our screenings were announced on that network. The audience was quite diverse, but it must be admitted that most of the women were from intellectual backgrounds, and the center suffered from an elitist image.

In terms of production and distribution, there was a barter system with the women who submitted their films; in exchange, they were allowed to use the cameras and editing equipment. It was a very good idea. There were always a lot of people at the center, people who had come to submit their films, to look for films, or to view them . . . It was very lively.

NPB and GZ: What happened at the center after Delphine's death in 1990? The center closed for a number of years, so its existence was not always easy. You spoke of a conflict, and conflict is certainly part of the history of feminism.

NFF: Beginning in 1985–1986, the team gradually dwindled from seven people to two, and the center, which was also in debt, closed its doors in 1993. The CNC, which subsidized the center, then took over the collection, which made it possible to salvage the videos. Everything was put in boxes and stored at the film archives in Bois-d'Arcy. In 1997, when I began to work on the history of the feminist movement with Carole for her film *Debout! Une histoire du mouvement de libération des femmes* [Stand up! A history of the Mouvement de Libération des Femmes], we felt it was really a shame that films were no longer circulating. It took us six or seven years to launch the project of reopening the center and recovering the films. New statutes were registered in 2003, and the center reopened in 2004 with the consent of its two surviving founders, Carole and Ioana.

NPB and GZ: Let's go back in time a bit—Delphine was no longer making videos in the 1980s.

NFF: That's right. She was making movies and acting quite a bit in the theater. She also devoted her efforts to raising money for the center and attempted to solve organizational problems. I remember—at least when I was there—that she was very available whenever there was something to be done, despite her professional commitments.

NPB and GZ: In the exhibition, we seek to understand how French feminism can be reread, particularly in connection with the problems confronting transnational feminism today. We think of the film made in Nairobi.[2] Wasn't there a kind of blindness to what was happening outside France or to the problems raised by women with an immigration background or from the former colonies?

2
Françoise Dasques, *La Conférence des femmes—Nairobi 85*, 1985, 60 min., 1985.

NFF: There was a genuine interest in what was happening in the international feminist movements. At the demonstrations, among the people protesting with us, were women from the West Indies, Réunion, and the former colonies, but more often than not they were rendered invisible. In the 1970s, specific groups were created, such as the Groupe des femmes latino-américaines, the Cercle des femmes brésiliennes, the Coordination des femmes noires, La Kahina . . . Then in the 1980s there were MODEFEN [Mouvement des femmes noires], which Delphine supported; the Femin'autres; the Nana beurs; the AFAIF [Association des Femmes Arabes Immigrées en France]; et cetera. Carole filmed some of these

groups (the films are available for viewing at the center). The film I made in 1987 with two friends, Debbab Houria and Houria Ouad, one of whom was French-Algerian and the other French-Moroccan, *Des femmes maghrébines créent des emplois* [North African women create jobs], was a way of showing the work and entrepreneurial spirit of North African women in response to virulent racism, since there was nothing on the subject.

NPB and GZ: So even at the center the founders became aware of their identity as affluent white women somewhat belatedly.

NFF: It's a little more complicated than that, since as early as 1970, Carole, together with Jean Genet, filmed Palestinian combatants and then supported the Black Panthers, particularly by teaching them how to make videos. Delphine became an active opponent of the Vietnam War and also defended Inês Etienne Romeu, a Brazilian activist and opponent of the dictatorship who was kidnapped, imprisoned, and tortured. In the context of French institutions and the government of the time, women and men from the West Indies or from Réunion were virtually unrepresented, and immigrants weren't represented at all.

NPB and GZ: How did Seyrig and Roussopoulos position themselves with respect to these divisions? Were they aware of them? Was it a question they asked? Perhaps they didn't have an answer. I imagine it must have been very complicated for women of their social background.

NFF: I don't think it was a matter of social background, since Carole filmed with everyone. One has to remember that the French universalist conception of society carried a great deal of weight. Yes, the feminist movement was implicitly "white." There was in fact a kind of blindness.

NPB and GZ: And yet there were a number of racialized women's collectives. We found a document that delineates all the groups. There were about twenty.

NFF: That's right—for example, there was the Coordination des femmes noires, as I mentioned earlier. We knew them, because we had friends who belonged to them. Women from all these groups came to the center, and that's how Carole ended up shooting with them.

NPB and GZ: The center's history shows how important images were for the feminist struggles. The videos that could be shown right away to the women who took part in those struggles made an enormous contribution to the history of feminism. Would you agree with that idea?

NFF: Yes, not only were these images filmed by people involved in the struggles; they also served to propagate the struggles and discuss them. These weren't videos taken, edited, and shown in order to then be stored in a closet. They served as a basis for reflection and discussion. On the other hand, Carole was in the habit of showing a preliminary cut to see if the people filmed were comfortable having their speeches preserved as is, et cetera. There are very few cuts in the editing in

order to give the ideas the chance to develop, which is very important and makes for very interesting things in relation to the writings of the time. In the videos, you have a living body of material. You can also see the hesitations of the people filmed, the way they look at each other and how they position themselves. It's an invaluable resource. That's something we're able to confirm on a daily basis: the center is frequented by researchers, activists, and journalists who come to draw on images of the 1970s and 1980s. Because the center was closed from 1992 to 2004, we have a gap in that filmed feminist history, but the missing material can certainly be found elsewhere.

NPB and GZ: How does the center function today? What are your activities? You mentioned research, but you also have activities—screenings, training programs in prisons, et cetera.

NFF: When we reopened the center in 2004, we wanted to continue to pursue the missions of the founders as well as develop new projects, like visual literacy education, that appeal to a younger audience. That mission has been enriched by analyses of gender clichés and stereotypes in the audiovisual realm with the Genrimages website and workshops.[3] We have also added another activity that I had already been engaged in for several years: work in prisons, particularly with women inmates, with screenings followed by discussions with the filmmakers. In these programs, we propose more nuanced images of women, strong women, heroines, particularly in auteur cinema. We also lead

3
See http://www.genrimages.org/.

film programming and image analysis workshops. These activities, which we have been engaged in for about fifteen years now, have come to play an important role at the center. At the same time, we have also developed a research project together with the group Travelling féministe, which is made up of women academics, museum and exhibition curators, as well as art historians and critics, with assistance from the Fondation de France. This group arose from the need to think deeply about the archive and make it available to artists and researchers in order to encourage its “reuse.” Research and study seminars were created. The *Defiant Muses* exhibition was born of this project. The core of our work is constituted by the archives, their distribution and digitization, and the promotion and acquisition of new international films. The creation of Travelling féministe has fostered better coordination between activist video and art or critical thinking. Recently, for example, we acquired Laura Mulvey’s film *Riddles of the Sphinx* for distribution. We are also part of the European project Wom@rts, on women and art.

NPB and GZ: To return to the 1980s—you worked with the center and then with the Festival de Films de Femmes de Créteil. What were the links between the Festival Femmes Cathodiques, the Festival de Créteil, and the center?

NFF: The Festival Femmes Cathodiques took place in the early 1990s. Syn Guérin, its director, started the project in order to showcase video art, whereas the center was created to focus on activist video.

A second edition of the festival was planned, but economic problems began to arise. Femmes Cathodiques made the work of American women videographers known in France. There were also women from other countries, like Marina Gržinić, but the Americans were still extremely dominant. This was certainly due to the importance of video in the United States. As for the Festival de Films de Femmes de Créteil, there were links and a few collaborations.

NPB and GZ: They invited Delphine.

NFF: She was invited as an actress, not as a founder of the center. The Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir has always positioned itself as an activist feminist center, which is not the case with the Festival de Créteil. The word *feminism* appears very late in presentations of the Festival de Créteil. The organizers have always emphasized that their intention is to promote the work of women directors. Another important difference is that at the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir we also preserve films made by men, whereas the Festival de Créteil only shows films made by women. So there are differences of political positioning. In Créteil, the organizers don't emphasize their feminist commitment, although they certainly do come out of the women's movement. The Centre Simone de Beauvoir was created by activists involved in the feminist movement, and we continue to film some of the movement's academic, artistic, cultural, and activist events and actions.





Delphine Seyrig, *Pour mémoire* [In memory of], 1987



when women realized it was not enough to fight / alongside men for a better world / but they had to fight as women against their oppression. / "HOUSE OF WOMAN OF THE MLF, PARIS" / "THANK-YOU FOR YOUR LIFE, SIMONE. COMRADES OF THE INSTITUTE OF WOMAN, MADRID" / The new feminism, as they call it, / began in France in about 1970. / "TO SIMONE, THE AFRICAN WOMEN" / "ASSOCIATION OF IRANIAN WRITERS IN EXILE" / "THE WOMEN OF ANDALUSIA DO NOT FORGET YOU" / "WOMEN OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT OF MADRID" / And we sorrow.

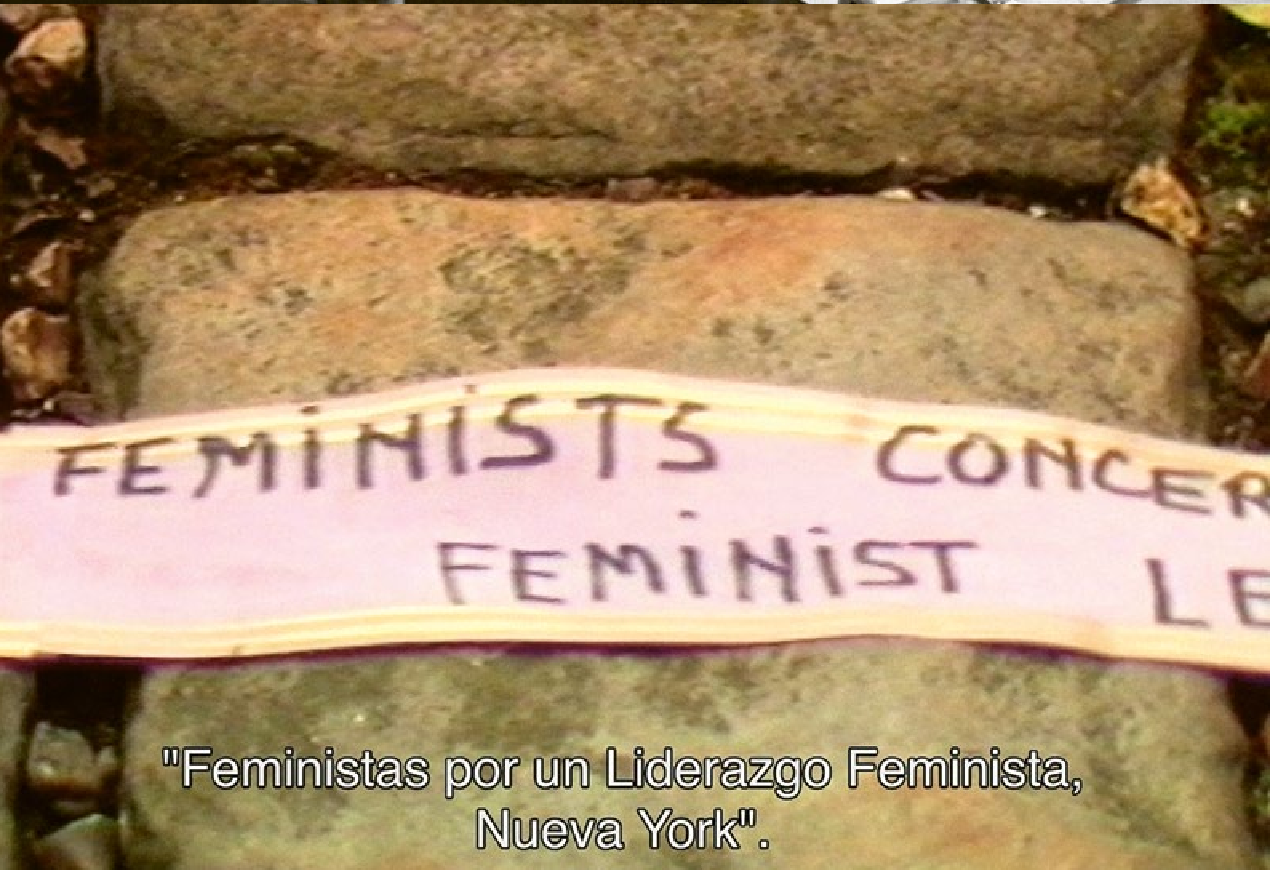


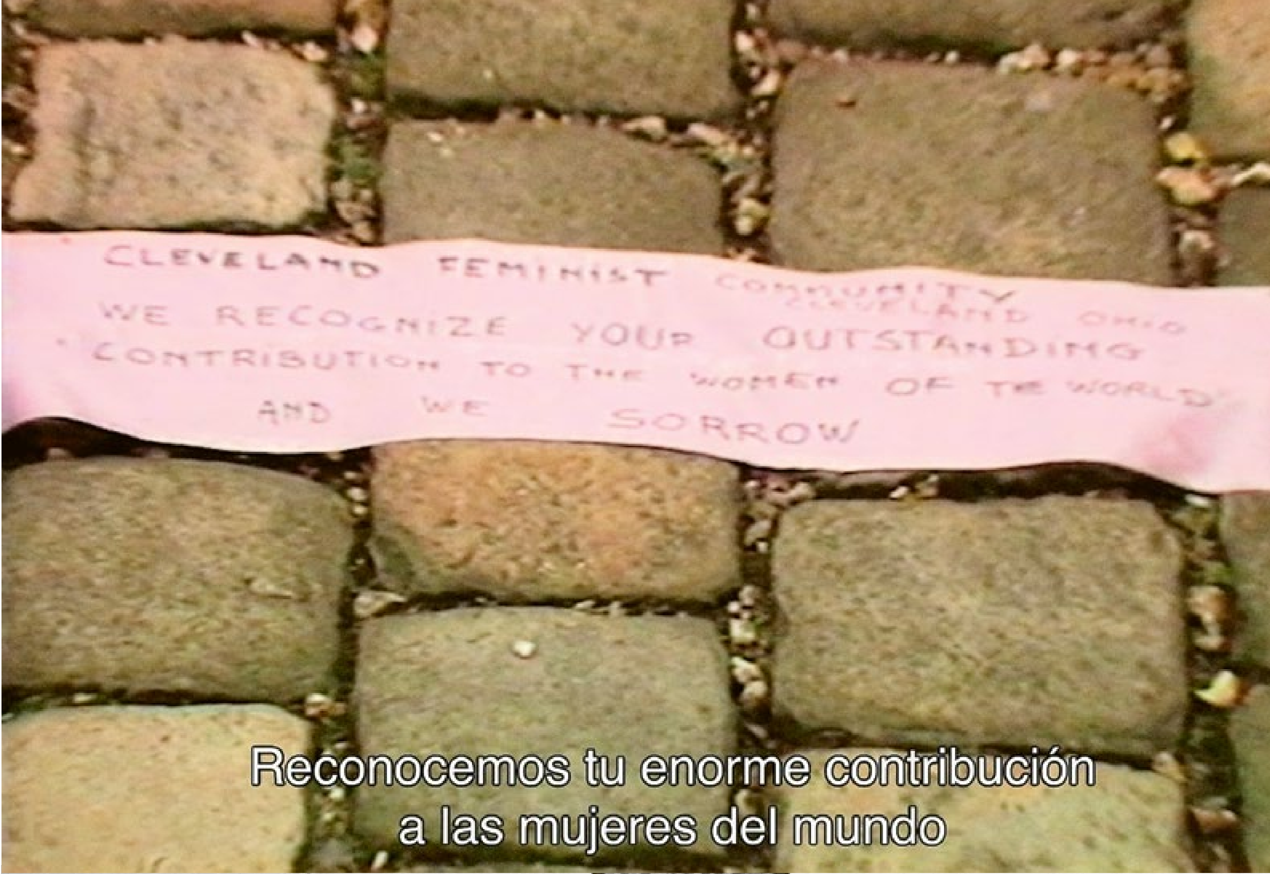
p. 212:
Catherine Deudon. Dany, Nicole Fernandez Ferrer, Annie Kensey, Carole Roussopoulos, Delphine Seyrig, and Danielle Mitterrand, 1984

p. 213:
Catherine Deudon. Yvette Roudy, Simone de Beauvoir, and Delphine Seyrig, 1984

pp. 214–215:
Catherine Deudon. Ioana Wieder, Delphine Seyrig, and Simone Iff, 1984




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MUSIQUES DE L'ASIE CENTRALE







Epilogue
Correspondence

Spanning from the 1950s to the end of the 1970s, Delphine Seyrig's correspondence with her parents (Hermine de Saussure and Henri Seyrig), her husband, American painter Jack Youngerman, and her son, Duncan Youngerman, provides invaluable insight into her artistic and political trajectory. The small selection presented here attests to her participation not only in the artistic and cultural life of her time but in the political upheavals of 1960s and 1970s France. In her letters to Jack Youngerman, written after she had moved back to Paris from New York in the early 1960s, Seyrig expresses her nascent political awareness of the anti-colonial struggles and, most important, the revolts of 1968, which she describes as a truly transformative moment. In the two letters to her son, who lived in the United States during the 1970s, she reflects upon two of her key artistic projects: *Sois belle et tais-toi!* (*Be Pretty and Shut Up*, 1976) and her unfinished film on Calamity Jane. In these letters Seyrig connects her own work as a film- and video maker to the significance of her collaboration with women filmmakers such as Chantal Akerman and Marguerite Duras, with whom she was working when she decided to embrace video as a way to express her own artistic and political views. Most important, this small array of letters demonstrates that, for Seyrig, life, art, and politics were deeply entwined.

The letters were selected in close collaboration with Duncan Youngerman, who provided translations into English when needed. All letters are courtesy of Delphine Seyrig Archives.

Carole Roussopoulos. Shooting of *Sois belle et tais-toi!* [*Be Pretty and Shut Up*] in Topanga Canyon, California, 1976 (detail)

1

Letter to her mother

New York, November 1959

[. . .] Jack's paintings are being snatched up like you would not believe. It's madness. He was offered an exhibit in Left Bank Paris when he wants, and the (American) dealer in order to have him is even ready to buy him anything he wants in advance, and wants to represent him in Paris. In short, unbelievable success even before the show has started. Jack finds himself phoning to Dorothy Miller[1] (who adores him) to tell him, "I'm warning you, I finished a painting this morning, do you want to see it?" and she shows up that very evening and reserves the painting for Nelson Rockefeller. And the next day the owner of Pennsylvania Railroad warns Betty [Parsons][2] that if Nelson doesn't take the painting, she's reserving it for herself. In short, there are 3 buyers for each painting. [. . .]

1
This letter refers to Jack Youngerman's career in New York during the 1950s. Dorothy C. Miller (1904–2003) was a curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where she worked from 1932 to 1969.

2
Betty Parsons (1900–1982) was an American artist, collector, and dealer representing Jack Youngerman in New York.

2

Letter to Jack Youngerman

Paris, October 1961

[. . .] Oh well, here it's unbelievable too! You cannot imagine. People kicked around, défigurés, tortured, right in Paris at Vincennes where they parked (also at the Porte de Versailles Palais des Sport), *6.000* Algerians, after a manifestation. Guys dripping with blood and I don't know what, guys thrown in the Seine, cadavres were found.[3] The manifestation was a pacific one. Women and children (Algerians) went down in the street to manifester pacifically against the couvre-feu, and now some of them, men, were shipped back to Algeria pêle-mêle, without clothes, without seeing their families, like sheep. I don't know, it's *monstrueux*. The campement at Vincennes seems to be so horrible that guys who delivered the food fainted and felt like throwing up at the way the Algerians were treated! Real concentration camp. it's been there for years, and nobody knows *exactly* what goes on inside. But what we *do* know is so revolting already! [. . .]

3
In this letter, Seyrig is referring to the climate of state violence and repression in France during the Algerian War of Independence (1956–1962). She refers specifically to the events of October 17, 1961, when hundreds of Algerians, who were peacefully demonstrating in Paris in support of the Front de libération nationale (National Liberation Front), were beaten and intentionally drowned in the Seine by police officers.

[…]

3

Letter to Jack Youngerman

Paris, June 1968

Baby, I must try to be unemotional but it's so difficult. Ah! I don't know how to explain to you the impression that one had walking at any hour of day and night at the Odéon or the Sorbonne and just this great nothing life going on as if night or day did not exist, as if the 24-hour system had never been invented, *as if one was free*! And today I am literally choking with tears in my goddamn throat because since the day before yesterday the goddamn fucking flics, Ah! are back in, and when you walk around the buildings, cops cops cops, and if you have to use the street to get into your own house, for instance across from Sorbonne, you have to show your papers and prove it.

This thing that happened here is the greatest that ever happened. I can't imagine when this has happened before. Perhaps the fall of St Petersburg was like that, I don't know. But *This, This*! I just will never be able to explain.

People sleeping on the benches in the Sorbonne classes and thousands of people yelling in the Sorbonne, or just walking through or writing on the walls such beautiful crazy realistic things, at 4 in the morning or at noon, jazz coming out of the windows from the 2nd floor of the Sorbonne and people sitting on the window ledges and lights on through the night and just this crazy *unbelievable* feeling of FREEDOM. I had it for the first time in my life. Now I know what it's like and it makes me weep as I write it! Now I know that nobody knows really what freedom is, nobody except those who were there! Freedom is oh my god, ineffable and oh, one doesn't really realize it until it's taken away from you again. That's when it hurts. I know also that these things can only be "moments" but *why*? Of course all the real stuff is going on and cannot be stopped! I'm working hard myself on projects of change in the theater. I am completely swamped. It's hard to explain the atmosphere here. [. . .]

You should have been with us on the flaming Bd St Michel, ripping the pavement and passing the pavés to the guys who threw them across the fires on the goddamn flics! Sneezing and crying and suffocating with tear gas we were. All the kids using poubelle couvercles to protect themselves like shields. [. . .]

Man, I feel so subversive, I don't know how I'm going to go about it, but I'm not going to just watch and read the papers! If you could see! [. . .]

4

Letter to Duncan Youngerman

Brussels, January 28, 1975

My extremely dear son!

Here I am in . . . Bruxelles . . . beginning tomorrow the film directed by Chantal.[4] I'm very happy to be working with her. I think her film is going to be very good, altho very depressing! She has (as you know) a very lucid view of life, and somehow it's funny how people who have a pessimistic view of things make me feel good and those who are doing less pessimistic things are less satisfying. The truth is always better, I guess that's it. Altho I am excited about her film, the need to act is fading inside me, and the discovery of video has given me desire for other things. I have made plans for a tape which is very personal to me. I have written a project to try and find money for it and I have sent it to two foundations to interest them in the project. I'll send you a copy so you can read it and, perhaps with Jack, see who might in the States try to finance such a project at least in part. If I could get 3 or 4 or more organisations to give some of the money it would be great. Don't lose the project, give it to Jack. I'd like to know what you both think about it, of course keep in mind that it is just the resumé made to please the institutions, it will actually be, I believe, quite exciting. I have already filmed with Sami[5] a production of Arthur Miller's *After the Fall* (an adaptation) played by transvestites, which brings out particularly Miller's text somehow. The boy (girl) who plays M. Monroe is fantastic, as you will see. She calls herself Marie-France, and her understanding Marilyn is more than just imitation, real insight, really moving.[6] Now that I have it on tape, it is part of what I will show in the tape about actresses. Because I feel very much myself like a transvestite in so far as I am no closer to the feminine image than they are. But I am attracted to the feminine image and have learned to construct it, as they are and have. Why? That is the interesting, and political, question. And there is a very strange complicité between Marie-France and myself. When I came to film them with Sami and my friend Carole,[7] Marie-France just flipped, she was like drunk, all excited at seeing me—not Sami, me . . . funny! She would give me looks and giggle and blush because she was very impressed with my presence. That is not sexual of course. And it was very sweet and funny. You'll see it all on tape. What a choice to become a woman! It's sort of making things worse for yourself, mostly when they will get older, if they do . . . Somebody like Marie-France can never go back to being a man, she *is* the most fragile vulnerable "feminine" woman, and she loves it so much!

4
This letter refers to Chantal Akerman's film *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, starring Seyrig in the title role.

5
Actor Sami Frey, Seyrig's partner.

6
Marie-France is a French transgender singer and actress who played an important role in the Paris underground scene of the 1970s and 1980s. She was also an activist in the groups Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire and Les Gazolines.

7
Carole Roussopoulos.

I think that actors and recently actresses all stem from this great desire to change identity, to not be restrained to the one identity society has trapped us into. Anyway, I could go on for hours . . .

I have just had a good example of how life can really always take its time: I saw a week ago the film that I made with Marguerite Duras, *India Song*. Marguerite must be now about 65 years old. And she has made, in my eyes, a masterpiece, and you know I wouldn't say that if I had hesitations. She has made a film which is like a sculpture, a piece of chamber music, a painting, an opera. For all her life up to exactly 10 years ago she was writing—books, and plays, and she adapted some of her books into film scripts which directors filmed, like Peter Brook, etc. Ten years ago, I made her first film with her, *La Musica*. She was not allowed to direct it alone, she was given a co-réalisateur, because they didn't trust this "writer" with no ciné-technique to do it by herself. Résultat: un film bâtard—not really personal, not really *hers*. She has since been working her head off to get a little money to do films in her own house as a studio, she has worked at it so hard that now, she has made a really beautiful film, shot in 10 days, no money. And it is really the expression of her litterature as well as her imagination and her experience. And I feel that she can just go on using sound and image again and again. Like a child. She is *free* with film and sound and words. You will probably see *India Song* because it has been immediately selected for the New York Film festival, but that's a long way off.

What I wanted to say is that Marguerite is at 65 childlike. Really the way she achieved this film was by being like you and François-Bernard when you were 8 years old doing plays in your bedroom. It's that sort of évidence. She wants to tell her story and nothing gets in her way, it's pure imagination, and you sort of believe her as she tells it to you. She doesn't try to recreate India in any real way, she shows you the Bois de Boulogne and she says, god it's hot in India during monsoon and you just say, yeah god, those flies and that rain and that heat, yeah, wow, Calcutta! When I saw it in private projection, the theater was packed, and not one person smoked during 2 hours, they were all listening and watching Marguerite's fantasies like little children. I sat in the back and felt absolutely rude when I lit a cigarette out of nervousness at watching myself, I had to literally let a little steam out, après tout. But really no one else even moved during the whole thing. And I thought, well, people really love to be carried away and it's really easy, all you have to do is be free and childlike and create what you wish. [. . .]

[…]

5

Letter to Duncan Youngerman

Paris, September 3, 1979

[. . .] I have decided to go ahead very seriously with Calamity Jane. Chantal has pressed the button I needed. I feel inspired, I am full of ideas, it will be a *beautiful* film. She has told me to write to a producer in German television who financed her *News From Home*. He can only give out 25.000 $ per film but he has thus produced Fassbinder's first films and many others'. He gets to show the film once on TV on his program and then the film is yours. It belongs to you, you can do what you want with it. I will do it in video and then transfer it to 16 mm . . . Chantal tells me it will work very well for the result I want which is a silent film effect. Sami must play Bill Hickock. Carole must play his dancer mistress. I will be Calamity mixed in with pictures of herself. Coralie[8] must be the daughter (I will film her like Swanson in *Queen Kelly* . . .) I may ask Frank Dunlop to be Daddy Jim, the Captain.

8
Actress Coralie Seyrig, the daughter of Francis Seyrig, Delphine's brother.

This will all take time, but I am very excited and suddenly have confidence in myself, due to Chantal's matter-of-factness. Suddenly I don't understand what was stopping me, it seems so simple. Actually. I think I do—listen to this 'cause you have the same disease: I wanted to say so much with it about my mother, myself, the contradiction between femininity and independence, women's extraordinary fascination with love, the desire for revolt and aspiration to dignity and respect, maternity, I wanted to say *everything*. And therefore couldn't even begin.

When Chantal read it, she said I must do it and for her there was no problem because she never thought I should say all the above things, she thought I should tell *that* story, period. It suddenly swept away all the complicated things that had stifled me gradually (when I first read it, I wanted to do just the simple thing), I don't know how I got all tangled up, but that certainly is what always happens to me until I destroy my confidence totally. Do you know what I mean, son? It's taken me a year to see the light. I got the help I needed from Chantal's simplicity and passion, and now I know what to do. Within 24 hours I have even found the method by which I am going to work. I am going to choose all the scenes in the story that I literally want reenacted and pretty soon I know I'll want them *all* re-enacted. But when I try to think of the whole thing acted out I get scared and think I can't do it. So I will start just picking out the scenes I think I *can* do, visualise, direct. We'll see what's left, but

I'm pretty sure gradually I will visualise the whole thing. You see, it is a question of doing what is *easy* first. Allowing yourself to pick out what is *easy* and doing *that*. This is a lesson for you too!! No guilt and thinking this is not right, this is not the way one does it. *Your* way is the way one does it. *My* way is the way one does it. I had a mountain in front of me, and now it has turned into a flowing river. I am Excited. I will start working on this choice of scenes tomorrow with Danièle Borde who will be of good council and a good collaborator. I'm going to ask Carole to take lighting lessons and to see the silent Griffith and Stroheim movies, films, cinemas. We will do tests together. But she has to learn to do the lighting that will be needed, which will be extraordinarily beautiful. I cannot do that. She must. I will work on the script. [. . .]



Statements

Etel Adnan

Postcard sent from Etel Adnan
to Delphine Seyrig, ca. 1984.

Dear Delphine, This is one of my favorite photographs. In it I feel the identity of the Earth, and at the same time, in a surprising way, that ancient Egypt is one of the Earth's basic truths. There may be more pressing things to tell you, but the world is beautiful—what can I do! I received the first twenty pages of *Calamity*. You know, I'm so familiar with the text that I'm not a very good judge. It seems to me that it holds up very well. This screenplay has the—very American—form of a *récit*. It's a *story*. The whole film is a kind of narrative. In other words, it seems to me that the drama isn't the source of the text but would be the result of the text provided it's performed with passion. In fact, the form itself (no less than the subject) is very American, indeed very Western; it moves from one event to the next. And it's quite fast-paced. And you get the impression (I'm thinking here of the text as a whole) that it's the events that provoke the emotions, not vice versa. And why not? It's the same tone you find in Calamity's letters. She ultimately says very little about what she's feeling. That has to be inferred. That's also why she's become a legendary figure, whom no one really understands. Two days ago, I found Roberta Reed Sollid's biography of her. It's just dreadful. You can't help but wonder why this so-called "historian" went to such trouble for a figure she despises! I'm sure it contains some interesting information, but nothing that would shed light on Calamity in a truly meaningful way.

Rosi Braidotti

"In Memoriam: Delphine Seyrig (1932–1990)"
Skrien 175 (1990): 64.

Delphine Seyrig. Those green eyes, of course. Unforgettable. And that white skin. A pearly kind of white, soothing and yet radiant. The stuff of passion. It was Duras's kind of white, made whiter by the sharp contrast of the black-and-white photography. Not the white of a meaningless absence, but the white of empty, hopeful spaces. In fact, if you look closely at *India Song*, at the many photos in *Cahiers du Cinema,* it was not white at all. It was the color of flesh when flesh comes alive. It was the color of silence when the silence resonates with hope. It was the color of infinity, if infinity has a color.

Delphine, that presence. She had the natural, powerful ability to redesign the space around her. It seemed to fold itself around her thin, catlike body. Her being controlled our perception of time and space. Her "being there" was simply so much more important than what she could actually do. Being is so much in itself. Getting up, leaning against a table, what an art. Delphine had that post-Antonioni capacity to reflect emptiness with unutterable intensity. Emptiness not as an absence, of course, but as an excess of presence. Her entire essence seemed to balance on the edge of what can and cannot come to pass. The empty spaces in *Jeanne Dielman*. The tempo of carefully orchestrated repetitions in Duras. The repeated *elle vient* to mark her presence. Or its likelihood.

Delphine, that voice. Recorded in films and interviews. Heard in the theater and on the radio, and also at political meetings and demonstrations. The militant feminist. An interview with Simone de Beauvoir, a discussion with Kate Millett, shouting slogans at a pro-abortion march. Everyone recognized that voice. Countless other passions came together in it and came together again. It charmed, fascinated, and soothed, all at the same time. The voice of the woman as a feminist had that same extraordinary quality. The French would say, *elle nous méduse*. Her voice kept us going and suddenly induced us to explore ourselves. Her Medusa voice, in which tenderness and ferocity unanimously brought forth neither vulgar allegations nor cheap understatements. A voice so intense that it steepened, flirting with the limits of the silence around which the chain of meanings leads the dance into death.

Ulrike Ottinger

Handwritten, unpublished text, ca. 1990.

We met at the Brussels Festival around 1976. At the time, the only films I'd made were *Laocoön & Sons*, *Blue Sailors*, and a documentary called *Berlin Fever.* She had seen those films, and she came over to me and said, "It's very interesting, what you're doing, and very strange too, but it interests me and I'd like to work with you . . .," and I was so surprised and, of course, happy.

Later I came to Paris, and she invited me over. Then when I wrote my first feature film, *Freak Orlando,* I called her right away. That was the first time we worked together. And after that we made *Dorian Gray*, *Joan of Arc*, as well as the short film […], and in between we saw each other a lot when I came to Paris, or at festivals.

I'd seen a lot of films that Delphine had acted in. I really liked her style of acting; she was a brilliant actor for the new modern cinema. It's the same as in music; you need modern performers. Although she had a classical background, she was a modern actor, and it was very interesting to work with her. She had a brilliant mind, she understood the roles very, very well, and she also asked a lot of me; she always asked me to explain things very *precisely*, and we talked a lot. During shootings, we always tried to go have dinner together in the evening to discuss the role, since it was the only time I could really sit and talk undisturbed, especially about the dialogue, since I sometimes had to change them a bit, since she spoke German, French, and English in them, and I love having different languages in my films.

For me she represented someone who could speak different languages, and I love that, having different accents and different languages; it's like music, and I can't understand why people don't use multiple languages in their films; that's something I'll never understand.

And I loved working with Delphine because she *herself* had a story I really liked.

When I visited her for the first time at her apartment in Place des Vosges, I saw a photograph of her mother on a boat, and she talked about her mother and the friend she traveled with (Ella Maillard).

When we traveled—which is something we did a lot together—Delphine liked to be the flaneuse, and I do, too, and she loved to look at things while pretending not to, so as to observe them better, and we had a lot of fun doing that, and she loved to tell stories; so I would spend whole evenings with her, entire nights, because she loved to tell stories so much, and it was always great fun to be with her.

I felt very understood by her, and I can't tell you how terrible it is for me that she's gone.

She loved life.

Duncan Youngerman. Delphine Seyrig and Carole Roussopoulos, 1975





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